BUNCH COMICS

柳生非情剣SAMON

【原作】隆慶一郎
【脚本】田畑由秋
【作画】余湖裕輝

新潮社

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BUNCH COMICS
新潮文庫

9784107714879

1929979005146

ISBN978-4-10-771487-9

C9979 ¥514E

定価：本体514円(税別)

雑誌 47555-93

時は天下泰平、剣術指南の全盛期。江戸柳生家の屋敷で、その五男坊として生まれた柳生十兵衛三厳は、特異な剣術指南役である柳生新陰流の宗家・柳生但馬守宗矩の父親・柳生左門一門、柳生五門に入門を許されるまでの苦悩に満ちた日々を過ごしていた。人の殺しに喜びを感じる父親の姿に嫌悪を抱き、兄弟子たちからも疎まれる十兵衛。だが、将軍家光の命を受けた隠密集団・鷹の目の巨大な陰謀が、江戸城内の権力争いの火種へと発展していく。そして、十兵衛の運命を大きく変える出来事が……。

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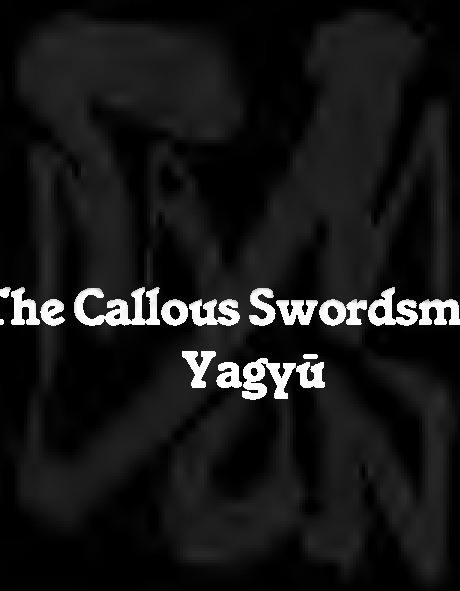
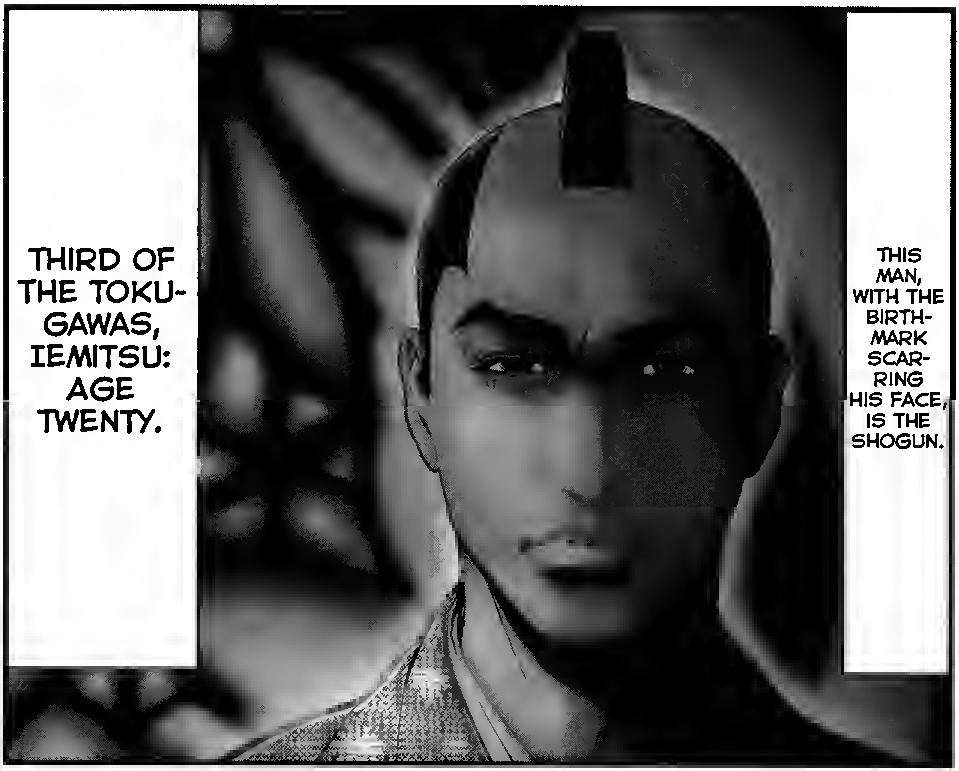


The Callous Swordsman, Yagyū

NOVEL: ICHIRO RYUKEI
AUTHOR: YOSHIAKI TABATA
ARTIST: YUKI YOGO

Chapter One	Iemitsu	003
Chapter Two	Samon	051
Chapter Three	Munenori	097
Chapter Four	The Willow Branch Style	129
Chapter Five	Jūbei	159

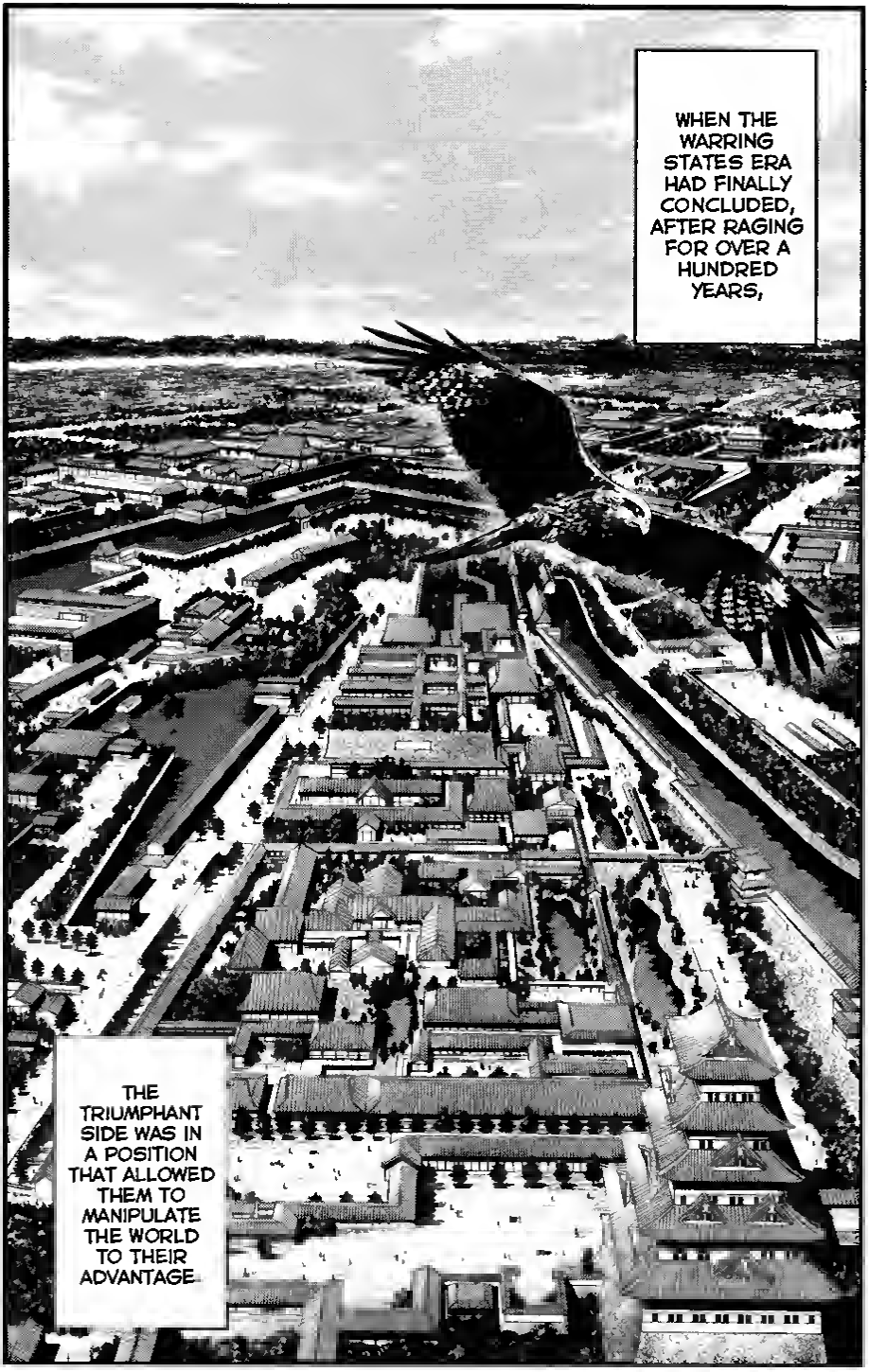
SHOGUN

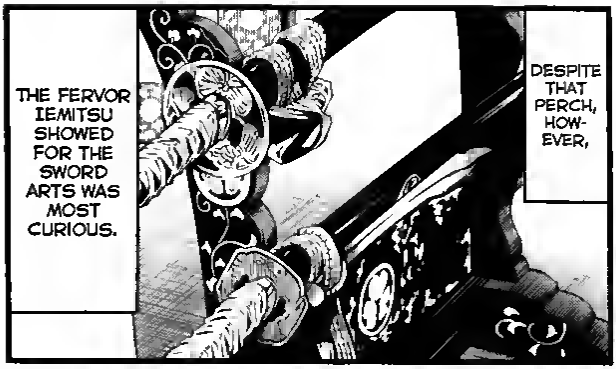

THIRD OF THE TOKUGAWAS, IEMITSU: AGE TWENTY.
THIS MAN, WITH THE BIRTHMARK SCARRING HIS FACE, IS THE SHOGUN.

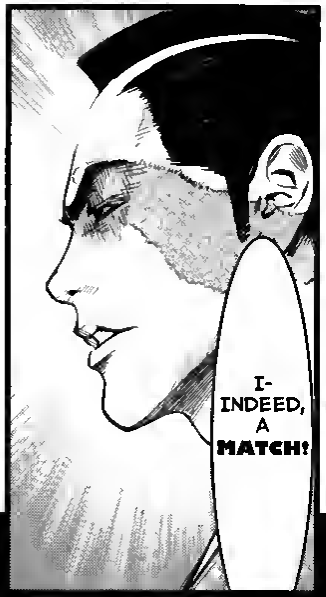
AND THIS YOUTH IS THE SECOND SON TO MUNENORI YAGYU, SWORD INSTRUCTOR FOR THE SHOGUN...
YOU SUMMONED ME, YOUR EXCELLENCY?

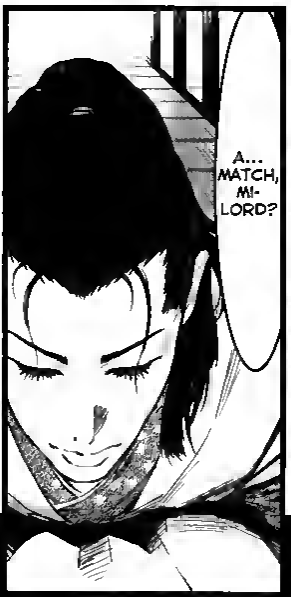
MIGHT Y-YOU HAVE A MATCH ...
WITH ME?
SAMON YAGYŪ.
Chapter One: Iemitsu

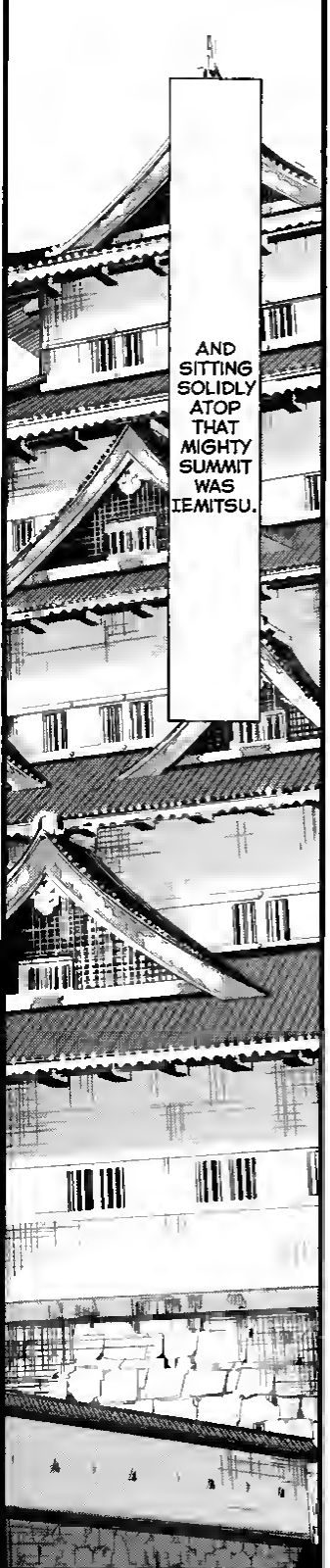
KAN'EI ERA, YEAR 4


WHEN THE WARRING STATES ERA HAD FINALLY CONCLUDED, AFTER RAGING FOR OVER A HUNDRED YEARS,
THE TRIUMPHANT SIDE WAS IN A POSITION THAT ALLOWED THEM TO MANIPULATE THE WORLD TO THEIR ADVANTAGE.



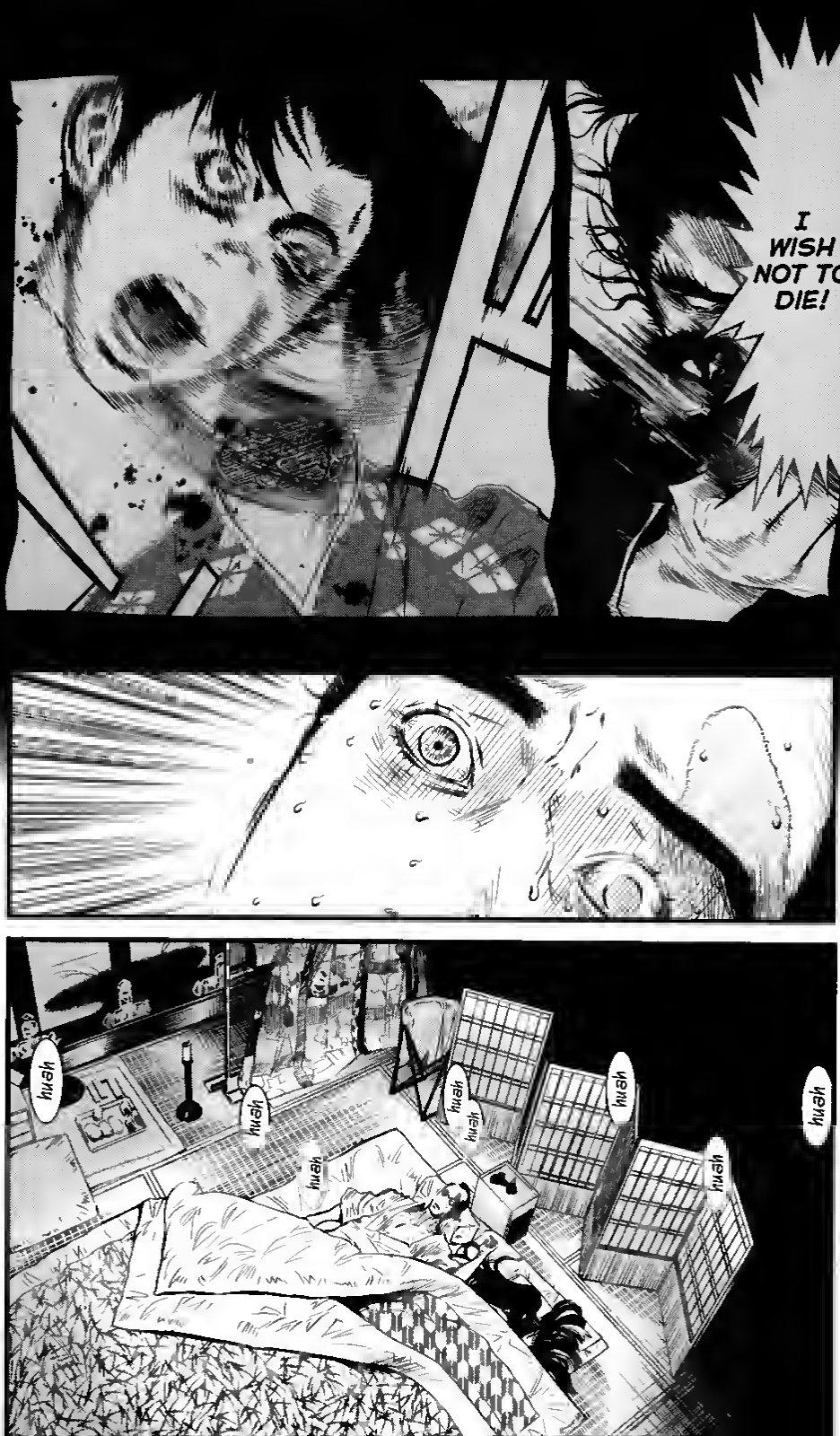






WHAT COULD BE THE CAUSE OF THIS?

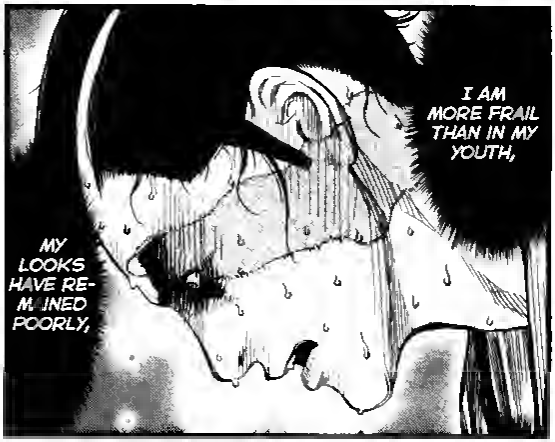
N-
NNNOOOO!
ガチ
ガチ
ガチ
AH-
AAAH!
MOTHER! KU-KUNI-MATSU!
F-FATHER!
I WISH NOT TO DIE!

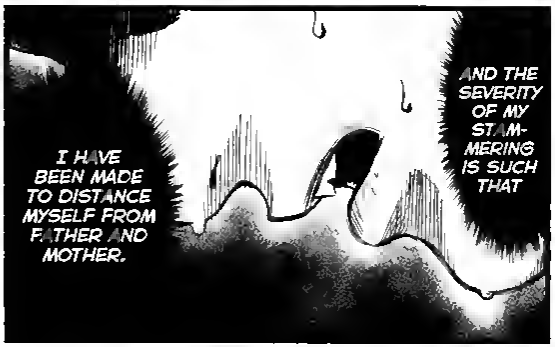

I WISH NOT TO DIE!
wish
wish
wish
wish
wish
wish

THAT DREAM AGAIN...

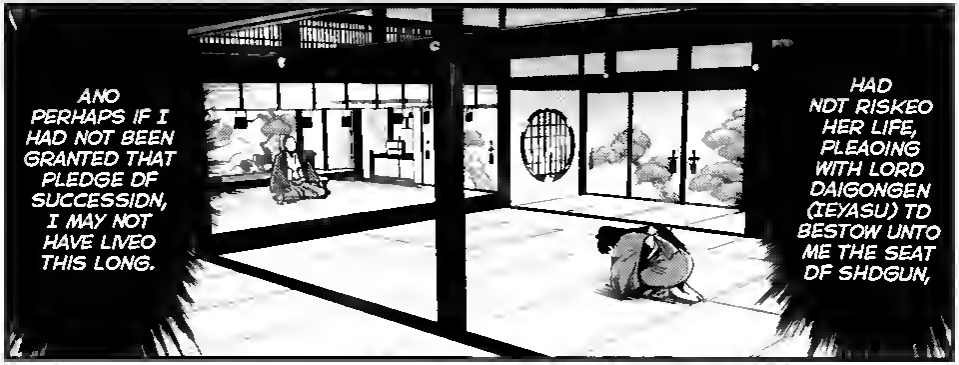
A PERSON HAD TO BE COMMANDING, ELSE THEY WERE TREATED LOWLY... THIS HAS BECOME LESS EVIDENT IN RECENT TIMES,

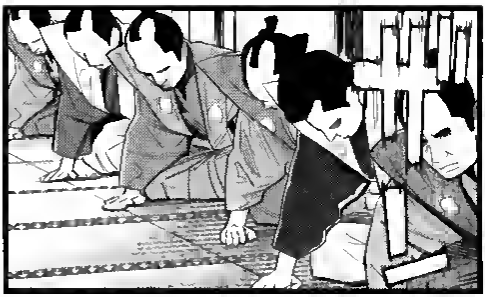
BUT PARTICULARLY IN THIS ERA, IT WAS VERY COMMON FOR THOSE WITH INFERIOR ABLITIES TO BE TREATED AS SUCH.

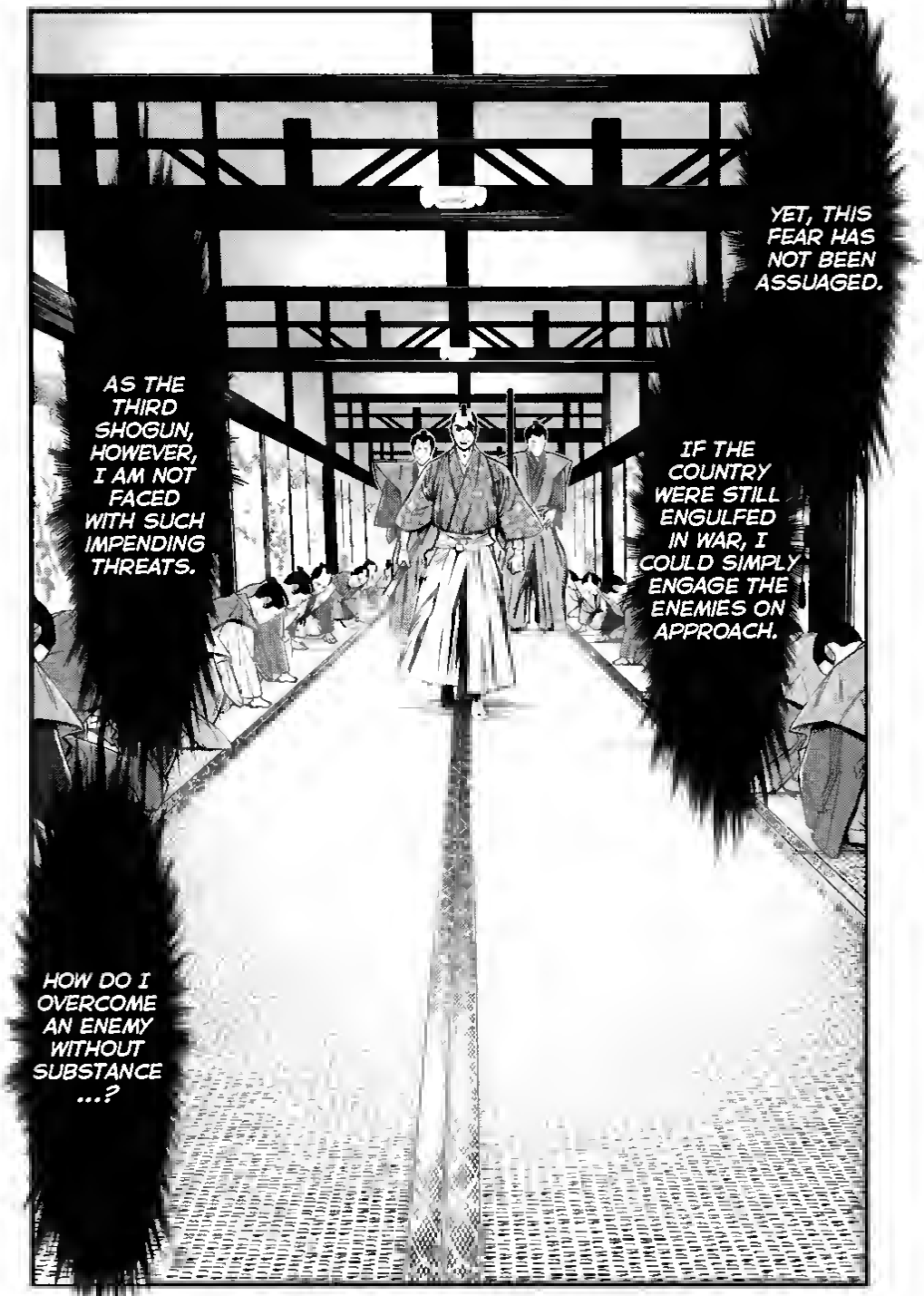




THE POSSIBILITY THAT I MIGHT BE EXPUNGED.
THERE HAD BEEN MURMURINGS THROUGHOUT THE CASTLE EVER SINCE I WAS SMALL CONCERNING MY YOUNGER BROTHER KUNIMATSU,
CLAIMING THAT WITH HIS INTELLIGENCE, GRACE, AND FIGURE, HE SHOULD BE GIVEN SUCCESSION.
THOSE MURMURINGS INSTILLED WITHIN ME A MOST HORRID POSSIBILITY.
PERHAPS IF MY WET NURSE, OFUKU,
Ofuku
(Known also as Kasuga no Tsubone).

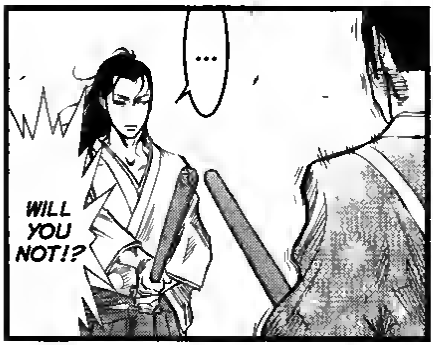

AND PERHAPS IF I HAD NOT BEEN GRANTED THAT PLEDGE OF SUCCESSION, I MAY NOT HAVE LIVED THIS LONG.
HAD NOT RISKED HER LIFE, PLEADING WITH LORD DAIGONGEN (IEYASU) TO BESTOW UNTO ME THE SEAT OF SHOGUN,

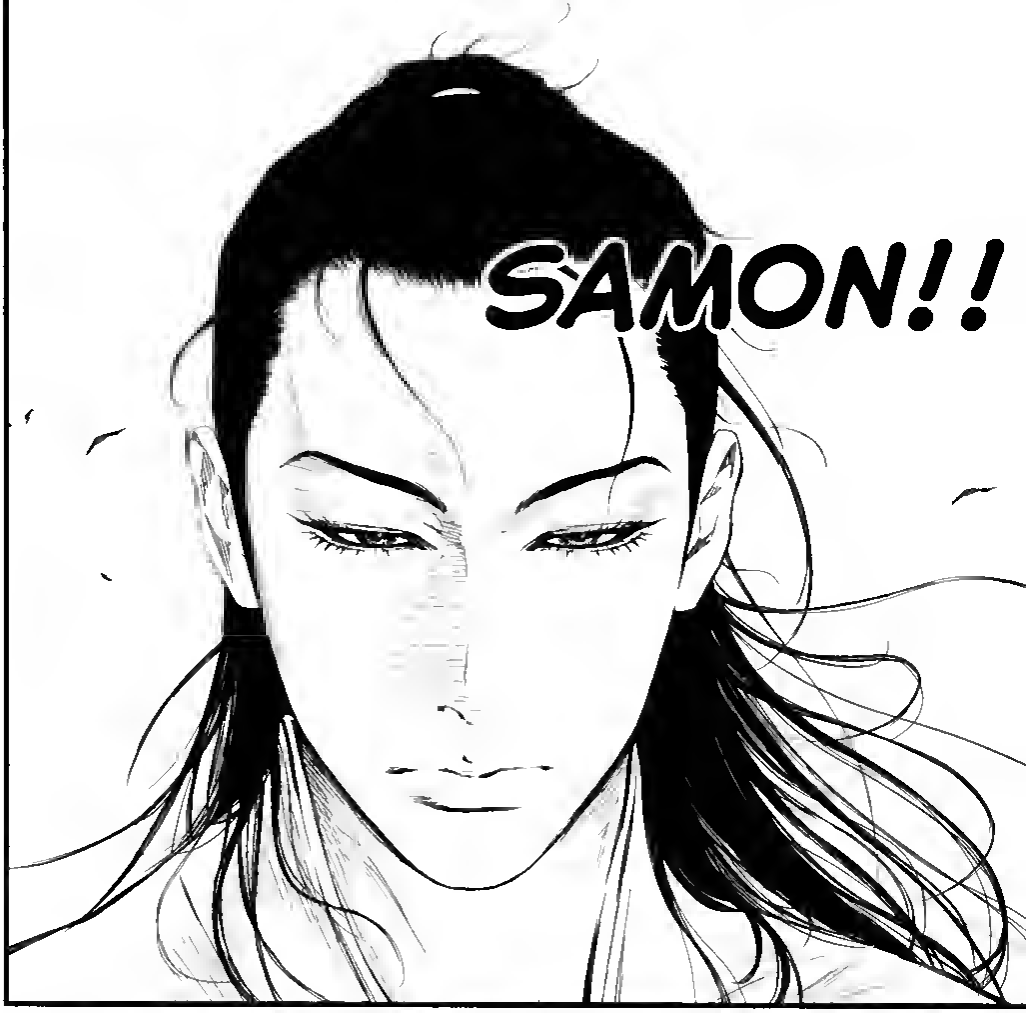



YET, THIS FEAR HAS NOT BEEN ASSUAGED.
AS THE THIRD SHOGUN, HOWEVER, I AM NOT FACED WITH SUCH IMPENDING THREATS.
IF THE COUNTRY WERE STILL ENGULFED IN WAR, I COULD SIMPLY ENGAGE THE ENEMIES ON APPROACH.
HOW DO I OVERCOME AN ENEMY WITHOUT SUBSTANCE ...?

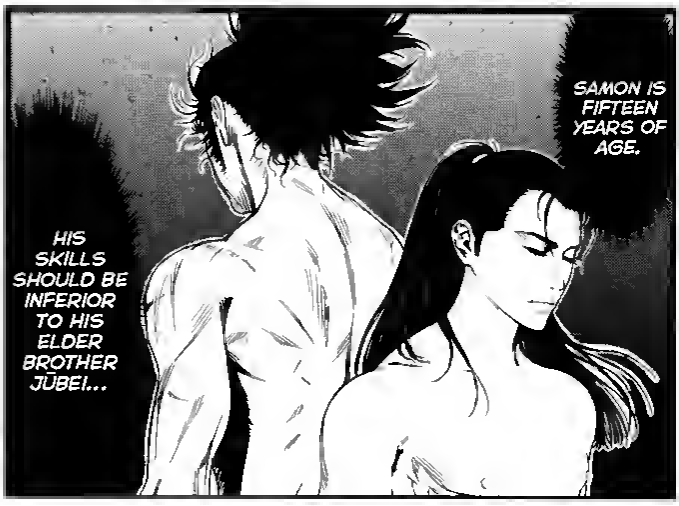
THE ONLY PATH SET BEFORE ME IS TO BECOME STRONGER!!

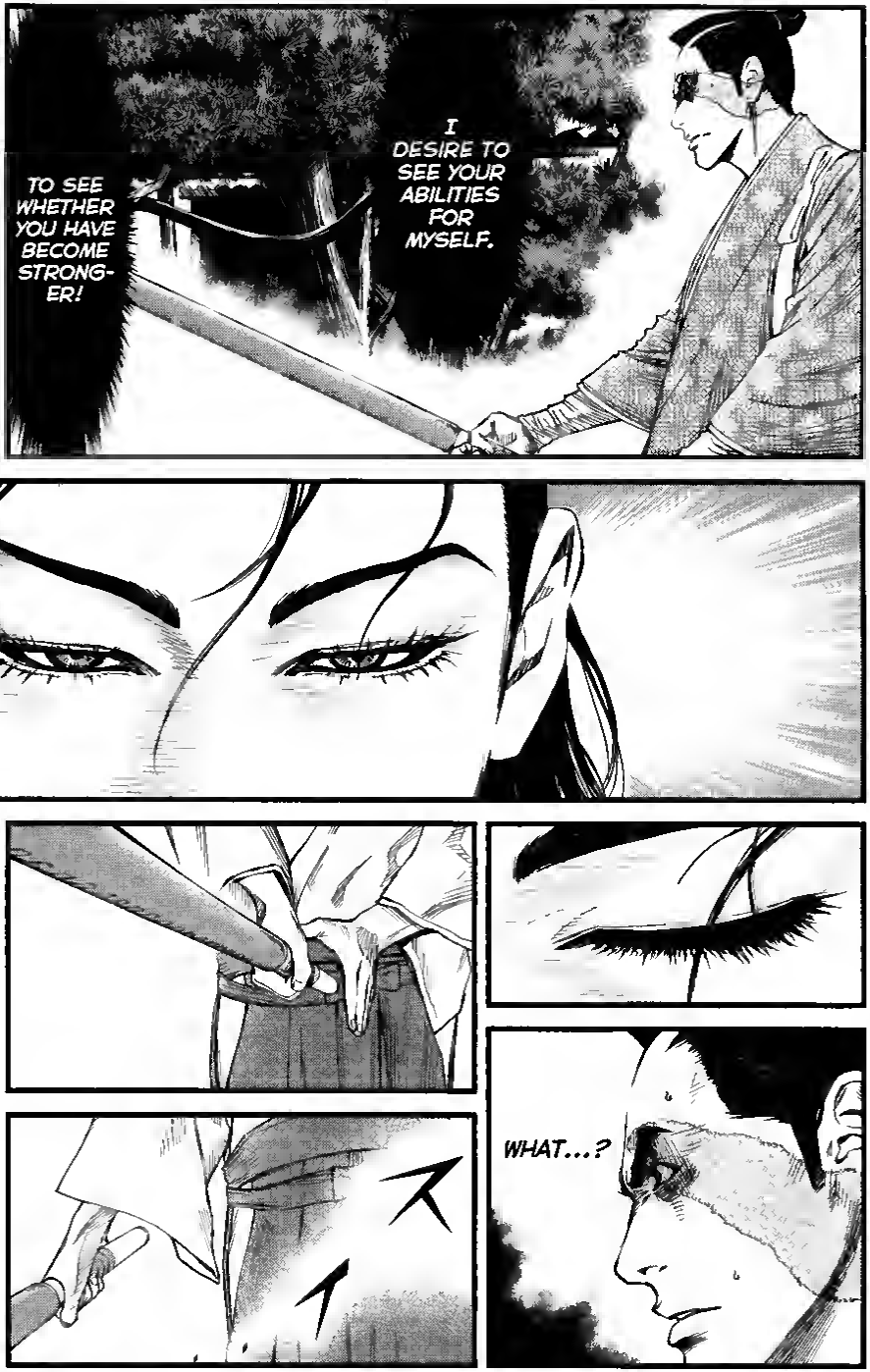
C-COME AT ME.
...WH-WHAT IS WRONG?


...
WILL YOU NOT!?


SAMON!!

IGNORING THAT FACT, HOWEVER—


HIS SKILLS SHOULD BE INFERIOR TO HIS ELDER BROTHER JŪBEI...
SAMON IS FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE.


I DESIRE TO SEE YOUR ABILITIES FOR MYSELF.
TO SEE WHETHER YOU HAVE BECOME STRONG-ER!
WHAT...?

HE DROPPED
HIS GUARD!?

スラ
スラ
…
I CAN DO THIS!

...AS I THOUGHT.
HE IS NOT COMPARABLE TO JÛBEI!

I AM BETTER THAN I WAS!
JŪBEI WAS TOO STRONG! NOT ONLY THAT, BUT-
SAMON, THAT IS...
WRONG!

ヤッラァ!
ズバッ
ピク
MUNENORI YAGYU CHOSE JŪBEI AS A SPARRING PARTNER FOR IEMITSU
WHEN IEMITSU WAS EIGHTEEN.
は
は
YOUR GRACE, THAT IS WRONG.
JŪBEI WAS FIFTEEN AT THE TIME.

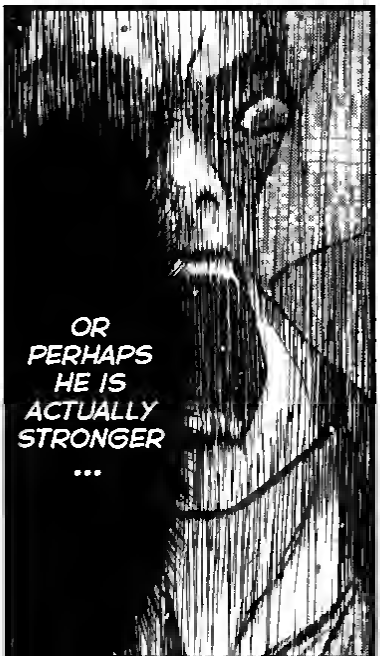
JŪBEI HAD THE MAKINGS OF A PROMINENT SWORDSMAN.
HE WAS MATCHED WITH EVEN THE BEST OF THOSE STUDENTS IN THE YAGYŪ STYLE.
AND OFTEN-TIMES MANAGED TO STRIKE EVEN HIS OWN FATHER MUNENORI.
JŪBEI WAS SICKENED BY THIS SPARRING PARTNER ASSIGNED TO HIM.
TO ACTUALLY DROP THE SWORD...
IEMITSU SENSED JŪBEI'S CRITICISMS
CAUSING IEMITSU TO FEEL HUMILIATION
AND ABJECT FEAR.

SUFFOCATED BY THAT HUMILIATION
YET,
THE SKILLS IEMITSU DEVELOPED WITH THE SWORD WERE NOT EVEN COMPARABLE TO THAT OF A RANK AMATEUR.
BY THE TIME JŪBEI WAS TWENTY, NO ONE DARED OPPOSE THE YAGYŪ DOJO BECAUSE OF THE DOMINION JUBEI HAD ESTABLISHED FOR HIMSELF.
THERE WAS A GAP BETWEEN THE TWO, BUT THAT GAP WOULD NEVER CLOSE.
AND IN THE WINTER OF THAT FIFTH YEAR,
NO LONGER ABLE TO BEAR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TENSION BETWEEN THEM...

IEMITSU DIS-MISSED JŪBEI
THAT TOO IS WRONG.

WH-
HE IS NOT EVEN STOPPING MY STRIKES WITH HIS SWORD
AND I AM CERTAIN I CAN HEAR EACH HIT RESOUND IN THE MARROW OF HIS BONES...

WHAT REASON HAS HE TO SMILE!!?


OR PERHAPS HE IS ACTUALLY STRONGER ...

AM I STILL WEAK!!?

THAN JŪBEI!!?

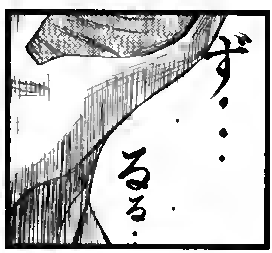
THE MAN WHO KNEW OF SAMON'S CAPABILITY, SUKEKURŌ KIMURA,
SUSPECTED THAT THE REASON SAMON WOULD NOT STRIKE BACK AT HIS BROTHER WAS OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE LEGITIMATE SUCCESSOR OF THE FAMILY...
SAMON WAS BY NO MEANS WEAK.
...KIMURA WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE—
柳生新陰

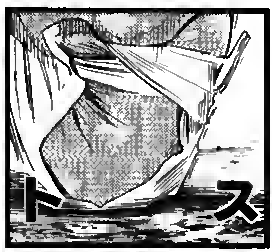
JÜBEI ALSO THOUGHT ...
Samon, why do you not strike back!? Do you mock me!!?
THE SAME THING.
FOR THAT CALMNESS THAT ALLOWED SAMON TO DODGE EVEN HIS BROTHER'S SWORD, AS IF JÜBEI WERE WAVING AROUND A WILLOW BRANCH, SAMON WAS...
...But I cannot.

BEAT
MERCILESSLY
HARD.

Huah

Huah
Huah
Huah
Huah
Huah


ぜ…ぜん…

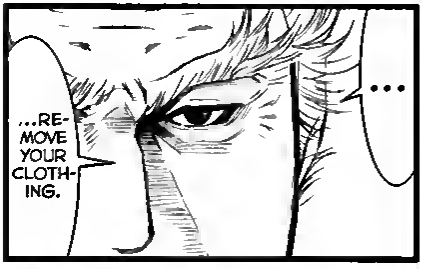

トース

IMPOS-
SIBLE...
HAS HIS
BODY
TURNED
TO
STEEL?...
YOUR
EXCEL-
LENCY.

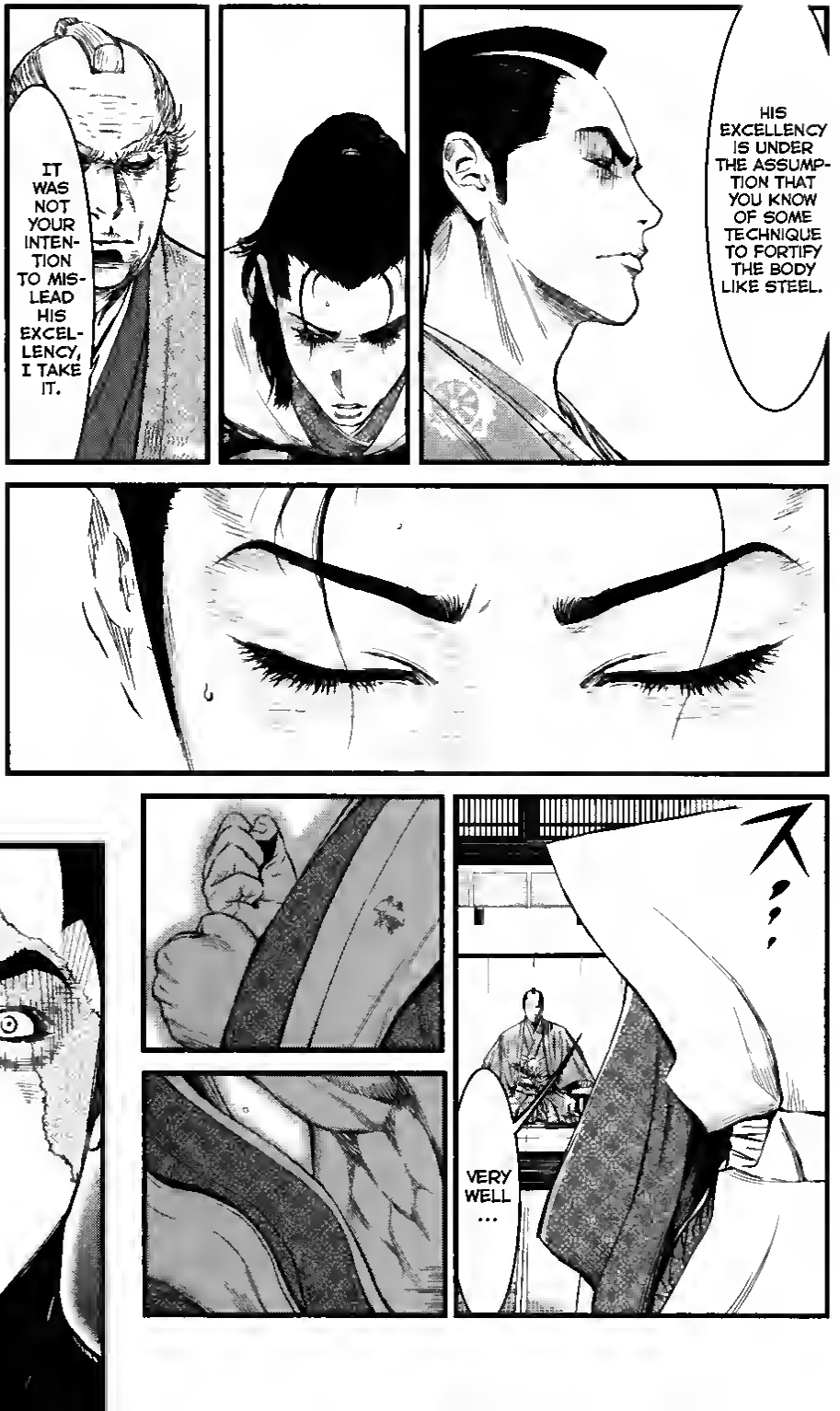
THIS IS HOW... A JAPANESE DUEL IS CONDUCT-ED.

..MU-
MUNE-
NORI,
YOU WILL TEACH ME THAT AS WELL.
BY THAT, WHAT DO YOU REFER TO, MILORD?
...
THE ABILITY TO TURN THE BODY TO STEEL.
NOT EVEN THE YAGYŪ
KNOW OF SUCH A SE-CRET ...
IT IS BEYOND POSSIBLE, I KNOW THIS...
BUT-
BUT...
YOU LIE. SAMON USED THAT SKILL ONLY A MOMENT AGO.
HE DID?

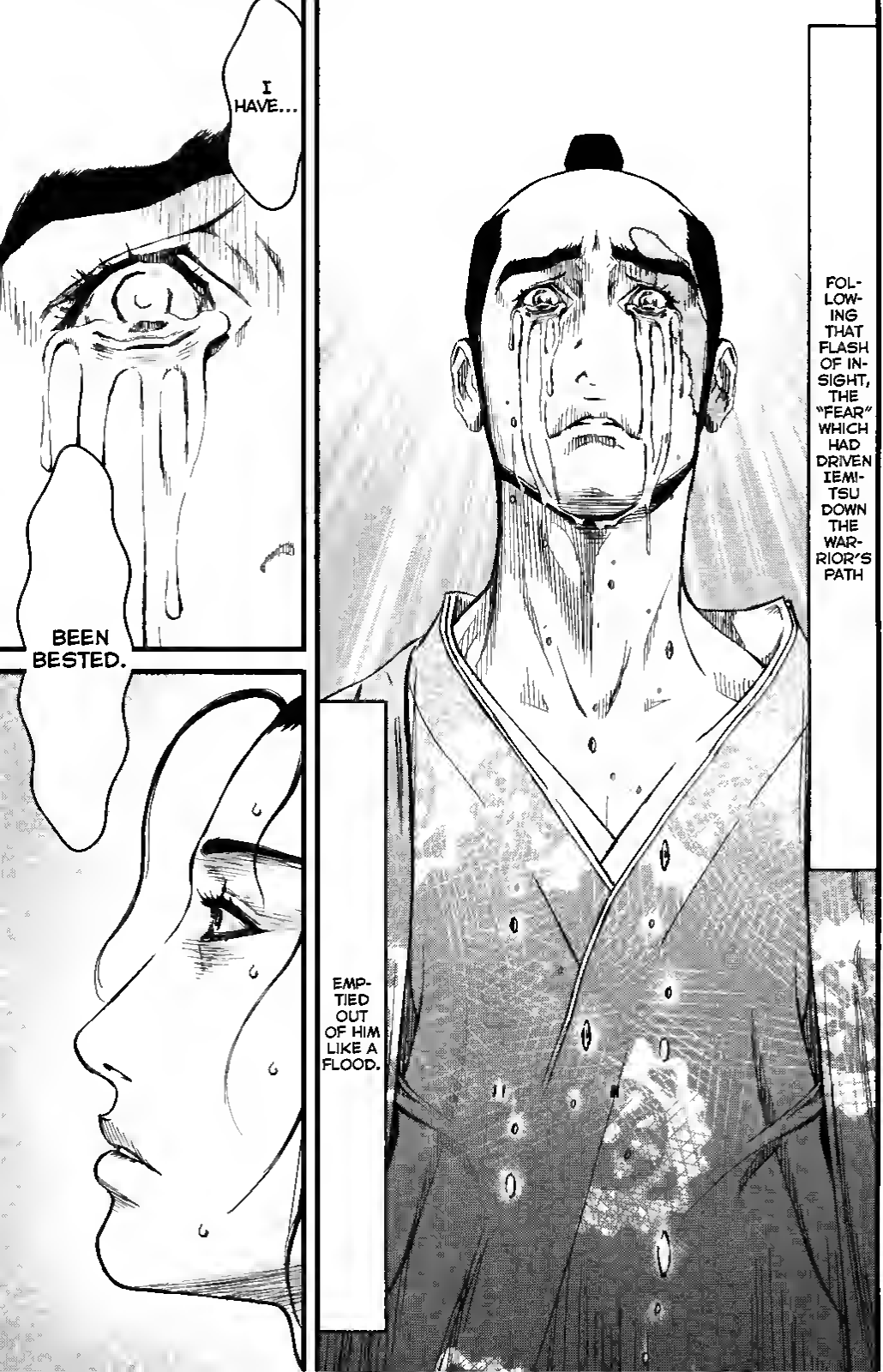
I UNDERSTAND YOUR FEVER IS SEVERE... SAMON.
...


...REMOVE YOUR CLOTHING.
...

...MILORD NEED NOT BE OVERLY CONCERNED.


IT WAS NOT YOUR INTENTION TO MISLEAD HIS EXCELLENCY, I TAKE IT.
HIS EXCELLENCY IS UNDER THE ASSUMPTION THAT YOU KNOW OF SOME TECHNIQUE TO FORTIFY THE BODY LIKE STEEL.
!!
VERY WELL ...

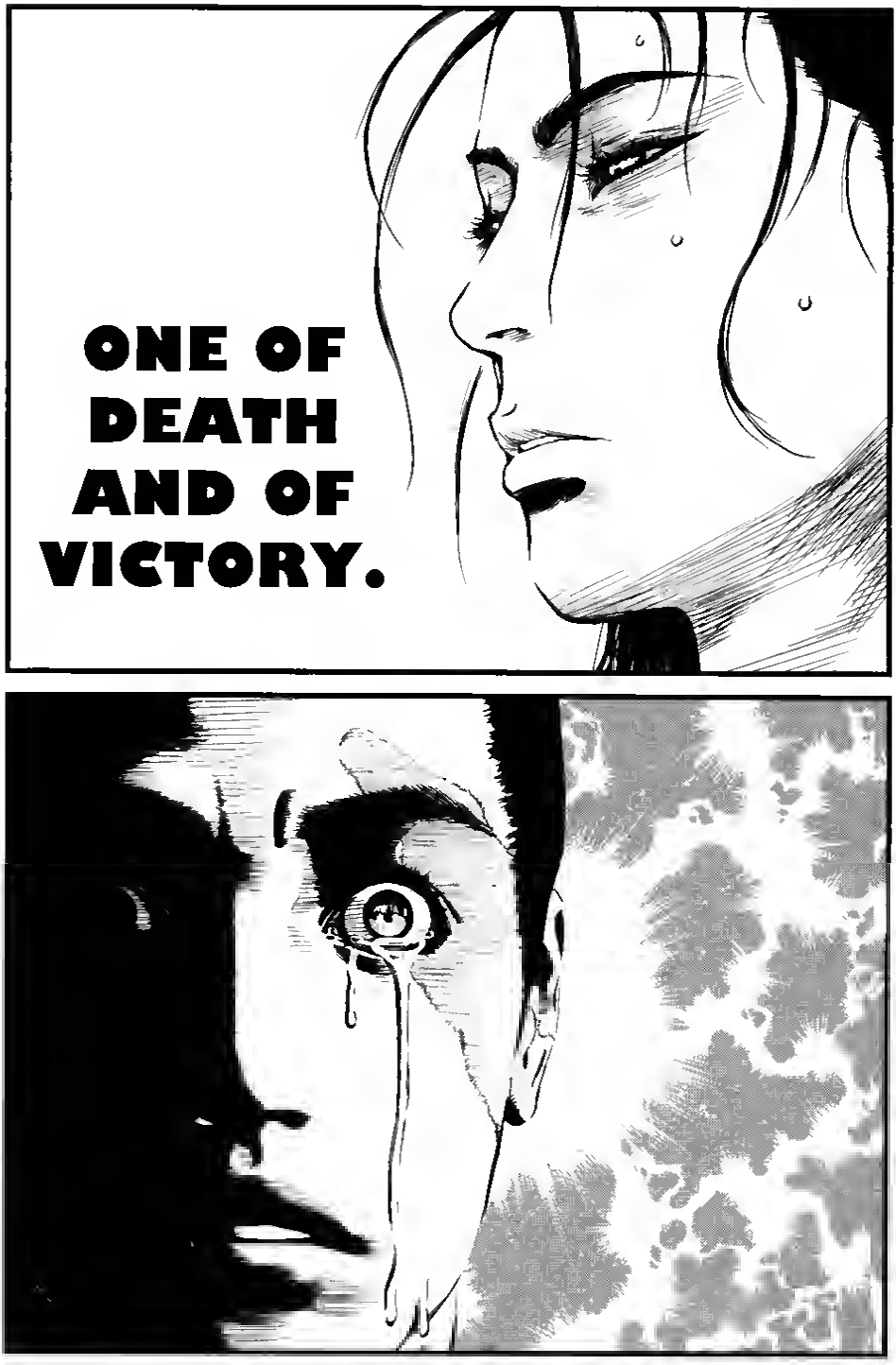
LET ME STRIKE HIM!?
HE-H-HE
AS IS CLEARLY EVIDENT, HIS BODY IS IN NO WAY LIKE STEEL.
...
...
..YOUR WILL?
HE WOULD HAVE BEEN SLICED UP LIKE NAMASU...
I-IF THAT WERE A REAL BLADE,
AT THAT VERY MOMENT,
IEMITSU GLIMPSED SOMETHING HE COULD NEVER HOPE TO ACHIEVE.
BUT...
BUT-...
...
YOUR WILL.


I HAVE...
BEEN BESTED.
FOL-LOW-ING THAT FLASH OF IN-SIGHT, THE "FEAR" WHICH HAD DRIVEN IEMI-TSU DOWN THE WAR-RIOR'S PATH
EMP-TIED OUT OF HIM LIKE A FLOOD.

...YOUR WILL.
THE HEAD OF THE EDO YAGYŪ BRANCH, KNOWN FOR RISKING HIS LIFE, WAS MOMENTARILY WITHOUT WORDS.
MUNENORI COULD NOT UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THOSE TEARS.
...
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT!!
WHY!?
I BELIEVE WHAT SAMON WAS INTENDING TO CONVEY TO HIS EXCELLENCY,
YOUR EXCELLENCY HAS LOST TO THE DREADFULNESS OF A DEAD WARRIOR!
A CORPSE
CAN TRIUMPH... OVER THE LIVING?
WAS THAT A CORPSE CAN TRIUMPH OVER THE LIVING...

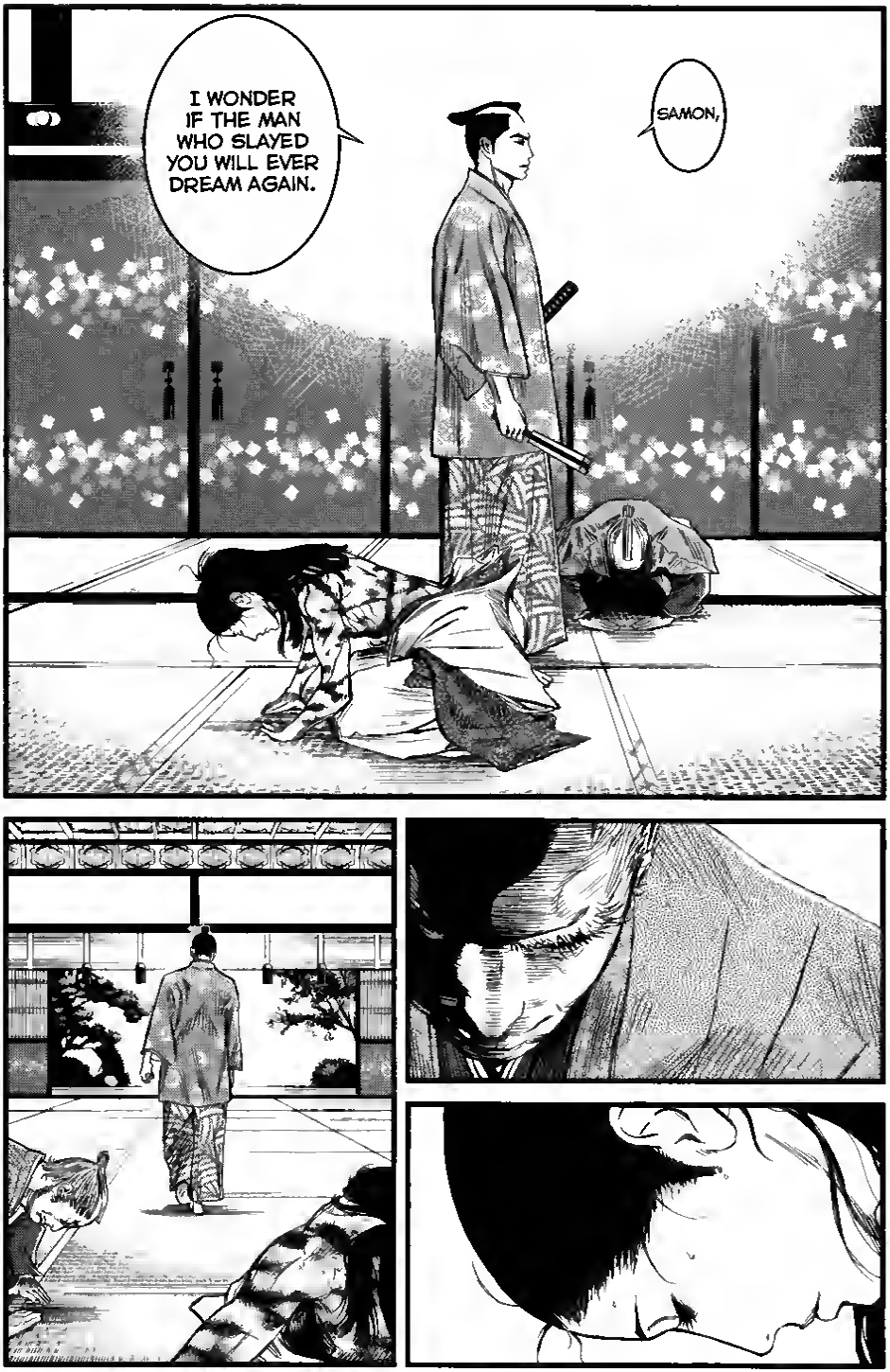
SHOULD HE ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE HIT ONCE OR TWICE OUT OF DUTY? SHOULD HE KNOCK IEMITSU'S SWORD TO THE GROUND?...
IN THAT MOMENT, A THOUGHT CROSSED SAMON'S MIND.
W-will you not!?
BOTH WERE MEANS OF FLATTERY.
NEITHER OPTION, HOWEVER, SAT WELL WITH HIM.
IN THAT INSTANT, SAMON
THE SWORD MEANT EITHER LIFE OR DEATH.
THOSE WHO FOLLOWED THE SWORD
COULD NOT USE IT TO FLATTER.

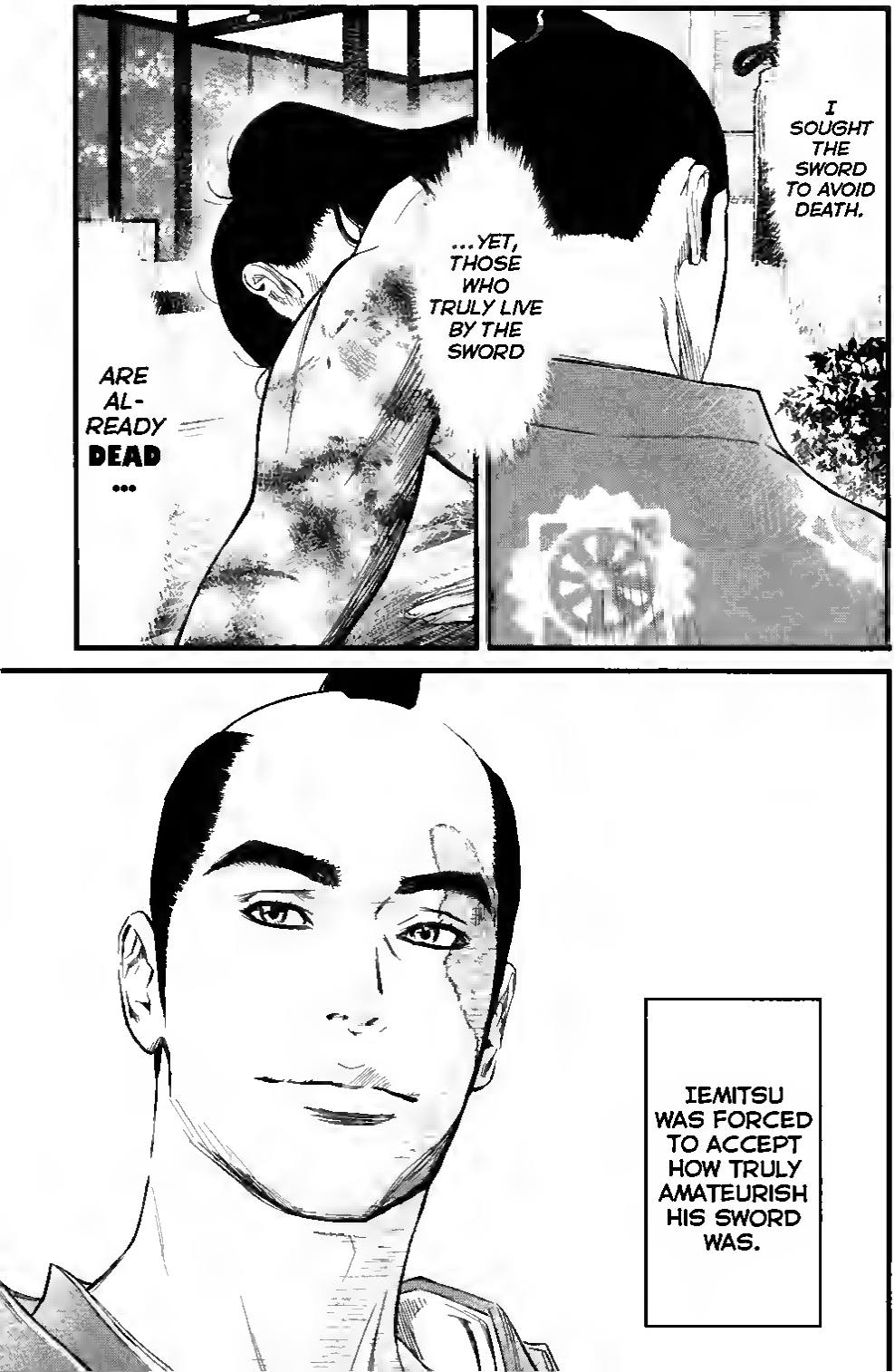
CHOSE
DEATH!
THEN, WHAT MEANING DID OUR MATCH HAVE FOR YOU?


ONE OF
DEATH
AND OF
VICTORY.

...DO WE NOT USE THE SWORD TO FEND OFF DEATH?
DO WE NOT GAIN STRENGTH SO AS TO AVOID ITS CLUTCHES?
A QUESTION THAT HAD CONFOUNDED IEMITSU SINCE CHILDHOOD.
...

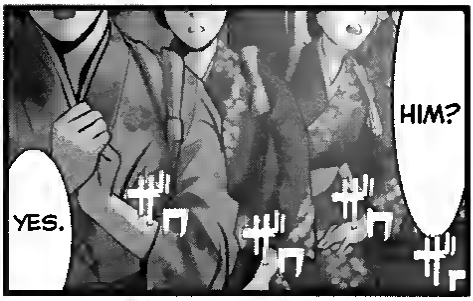
YOUR EX-
CELLENCY,
THERE ARE
TIMES WHEN
ONE MUST
EMBRACE
DEATH
WITHOUT
QUALM.

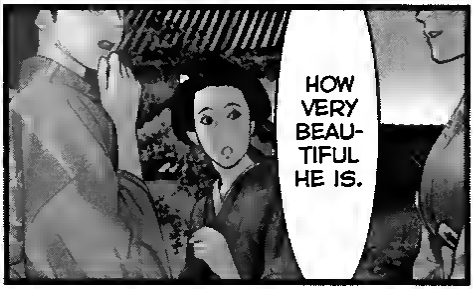

I WONDER IF THE MAN WHO SLAYED YOU WILL EVER DREAM AGAIN.
SAMON,


I SOUGHT THE SWORD TO AVOID DEATH.
...YET, THOSE WHO TRULY LIVE BY THE SWORD
ARE AL-READY DEAD ...
IEMITSU WAS FORCED TO ACCEPT HOW TRULY AMATEURISH HIS SWORD WAS.

Chapter One: Iemitsu (End)

WOMEN!



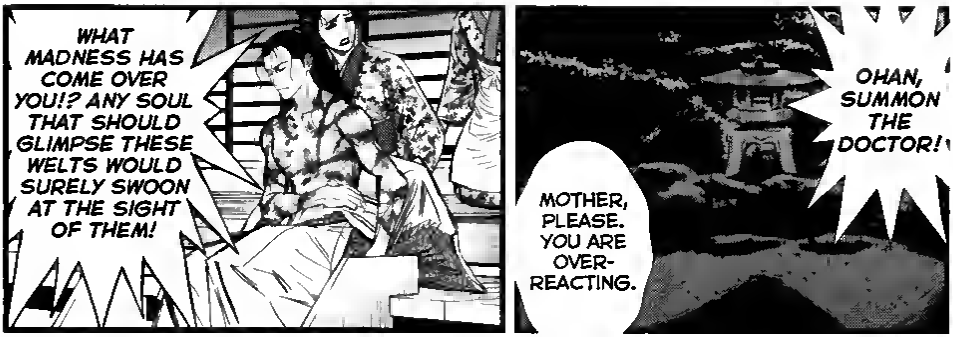


FALL NOT IN LOVE.
SPEAK NOT OF LOVE.

YET THAT IS HOW EXQUISITE HE WAS.

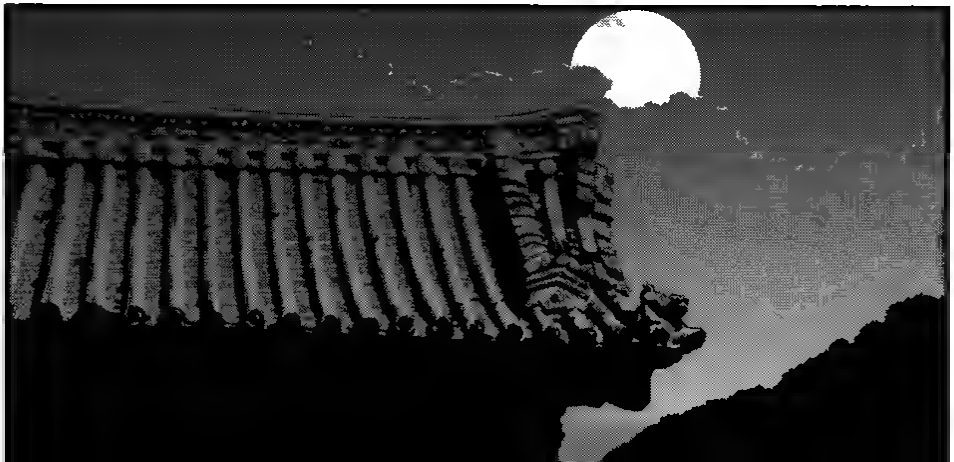
HE HAD AN ALLURING QUALITY THAT BEWILDERED EVERYONE, NOT JUST WOMEN...
SAMON YAGYŪ, AGE FIFTEEN.
Chapter Two: Samon

KAN'EI YEAR 4 (1627)
EDO
YAGYŪ MANOR
KYAAAAA AAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAA! SAMON!!!
...MOTH-ER... PLEASE WILL YOU BE SILENT?
L-LORD SAMON, YOUR BODY...


WHAT MADNESS HAS COME OVER YOU!? ANY SOUL THAT SHOULD GLIMPSE THESE WELTS WOULD SURELY SWOON AT THE SIGHT OF THEM!
MOTHER, PLEASE. YOU ARE OVER-REACTING.
OHAN, SUMMON THE DOCTOR!

OTHERS SWEAR BY MOTHER'S BEAUTY, OF HOW SHE EXUDES VOLUP-TUOUS-NESS.
WHY DO WOMEN SQUAWK AND SMOTHER YOU SO EX-CESSIVELY, I WONDER?

IF THIS IS WHAT VOLUPTUOUSNESS IS, I WANT NOTHING OF IT.



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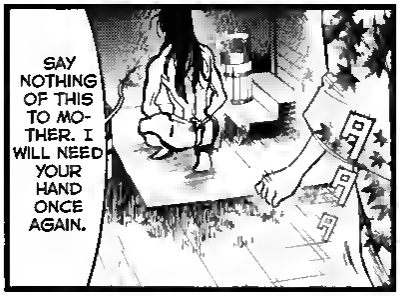
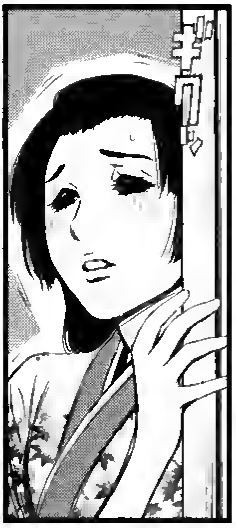

SAY NOTHING OF THIS TO MOTHER. I WILL NEED YOUR HAND ONCE AGAIN.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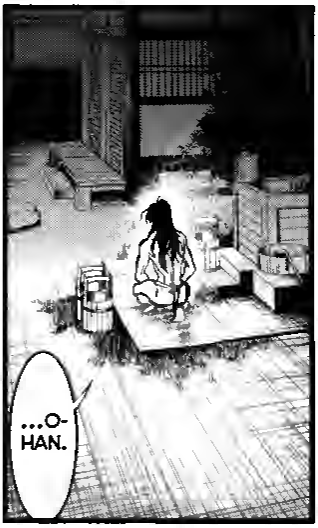
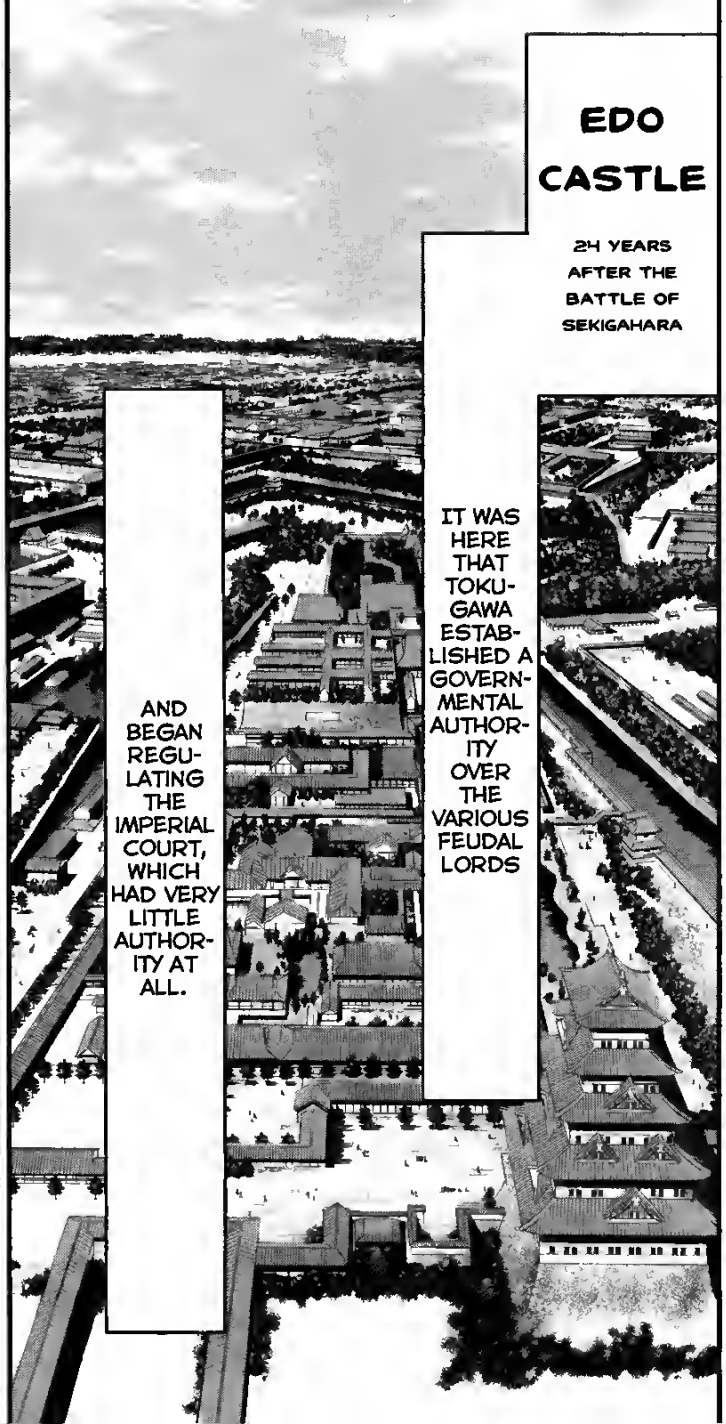

...O-HAN.

I CANNOT ENDURE THIS OINTMENT SMOTHERING ME.
LORD SAMON, DO NOT OVEREXERT YOURSELF, PLEASE ...

THE THIRD SHOGUN
IEMITSU, AGE TWENTY-FOUR

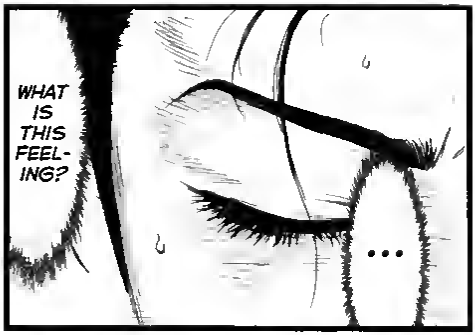

EDO CASTLE
24 YEARS AFTER THE BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA
IT WAS HERE THAT TOKUGAWA ESTABLISHED A GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITY OVER THE VARIOUS FEUDAL LORDS
AND BEGAN REGULATING THE IMPERIAL COURT, WHICH HAD VERY LITTLE AUTHORITY AT ALL.

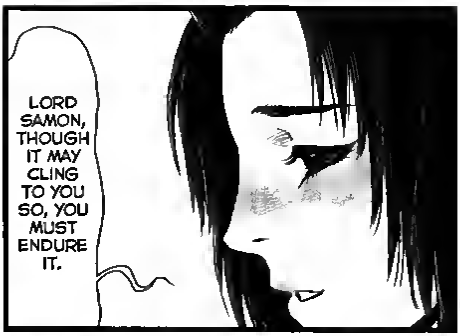
WOULD YOU POUR WATER OVER ME? I AM FEVERISH.

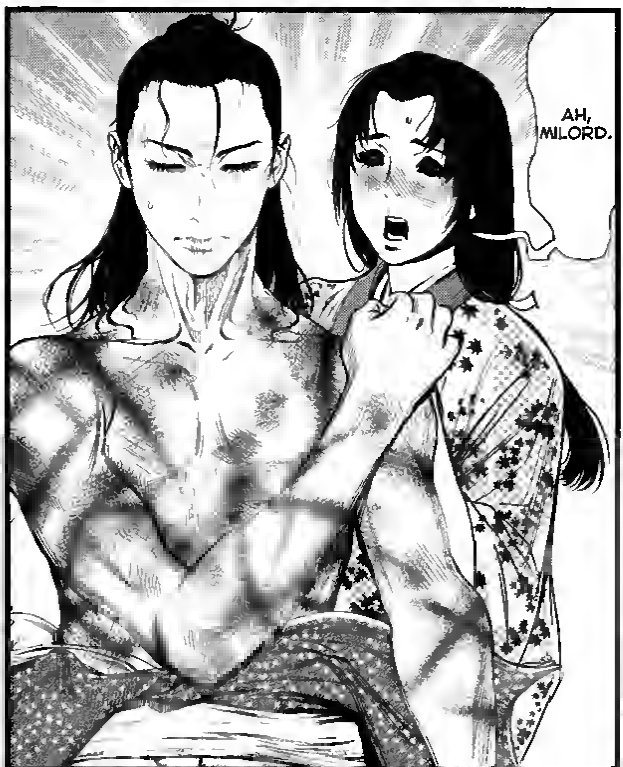
...OF COURSE.

SAMON, HOW DO YOU FARE? H-HAS YOUR FEVER SUB-SIDED?
YOU NEED NOT WORRY, YOUR EXCEL-LENCY.
WE WERE SPAR-RING.
THEN, WHAT MEANING DID OUR MATCH HAVE FOR YOU?
I WILL NOT HAVE IT. GRANT ME A LOOK AT YOUR WELTS.
ONE OF DEATH AND OF VICTORY.
..DO WE NOT USE THE SWORD TO FEND OFF DEATH?
YOUR EX-CELLENCY, THERE ARE TIMES WHEN ONE MUST EMBRACE DEATH WITHOUT QUALM.
...

AS I THOUGHT. YOU ARE LIKE A POT.
THIS FEELS OIFFERENT FROM WHEN I SUMMON OUR SERVANT GIRLS TOKAKO ANO OHAN...


WHAT IS THIS FEEL-ING?
...

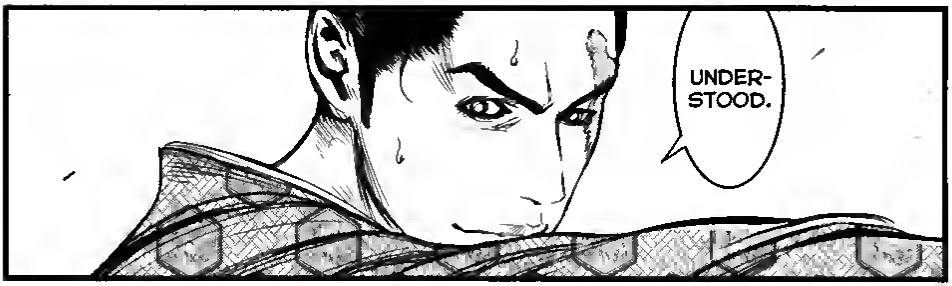

LORD SAMON, THOUGH IT MAY CLING TO YOU SO, YOU MUST ENDURE IT.

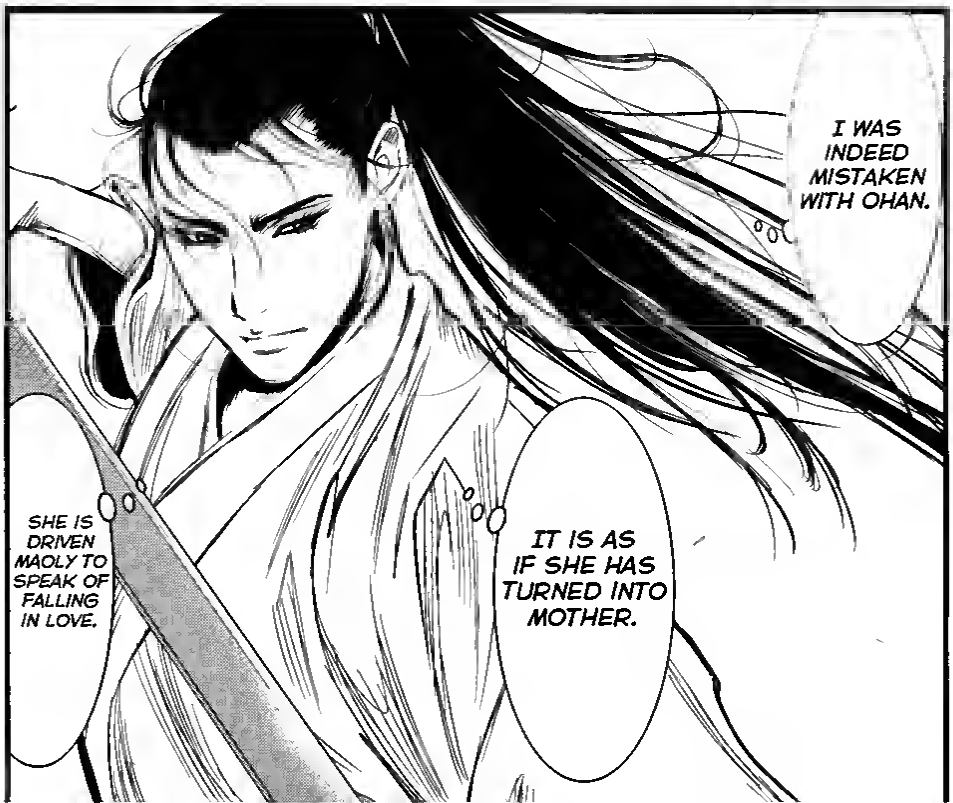

AH, MILORD.

I HAD MY FIRST EVER...
BUT AT THE AGE OF FIFTEEN,
I KNOW NOT THE REASON.
SEXUAL URGE.

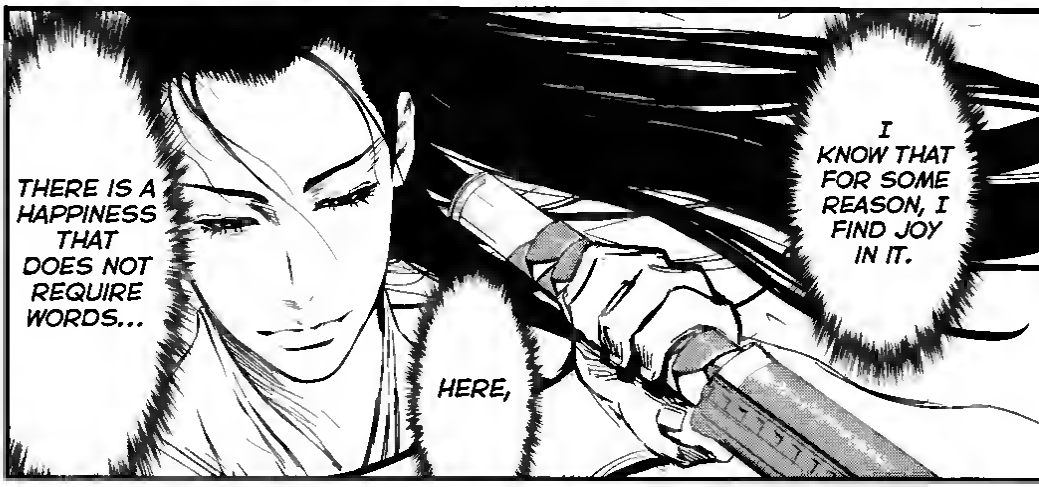
AAH AAAH! M-MY LORRRRRD!
IS THIS WHAT THEY CALL A COUPLING BETWEEN MAN ANO WOMAN?
FOR-GIVE ME.
THIS IS WRONG. MY DESIRE IS NOT FOR OHAN.
...I HAVE MISLED YOU, OHAN. WHAT THIS IS...
I LOVE YOU. I LOVE YOU, MASTER SAMON!
WHAT IS THIS OVER-WHELMING DRIVE?...

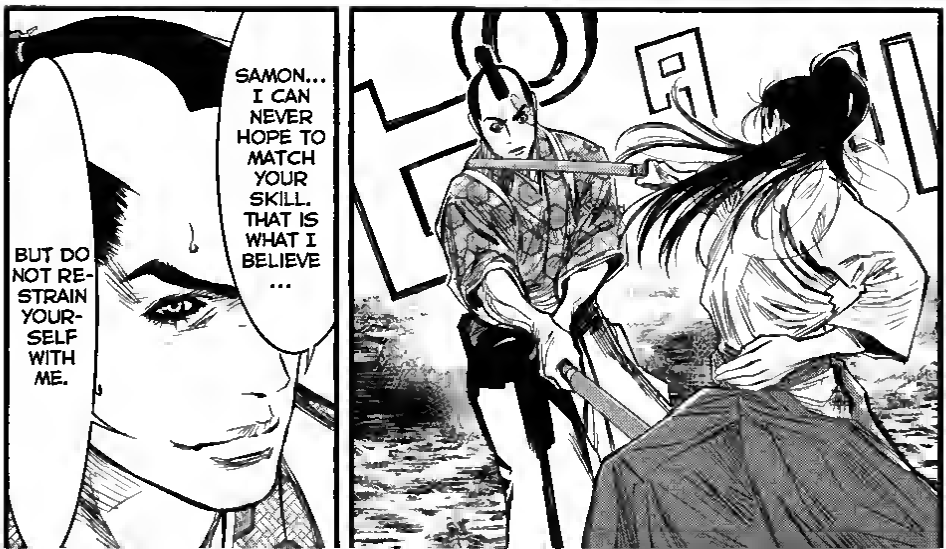
YOUR EXCELLENCY, THAT IS WRONG.


UNDERSTOOD.

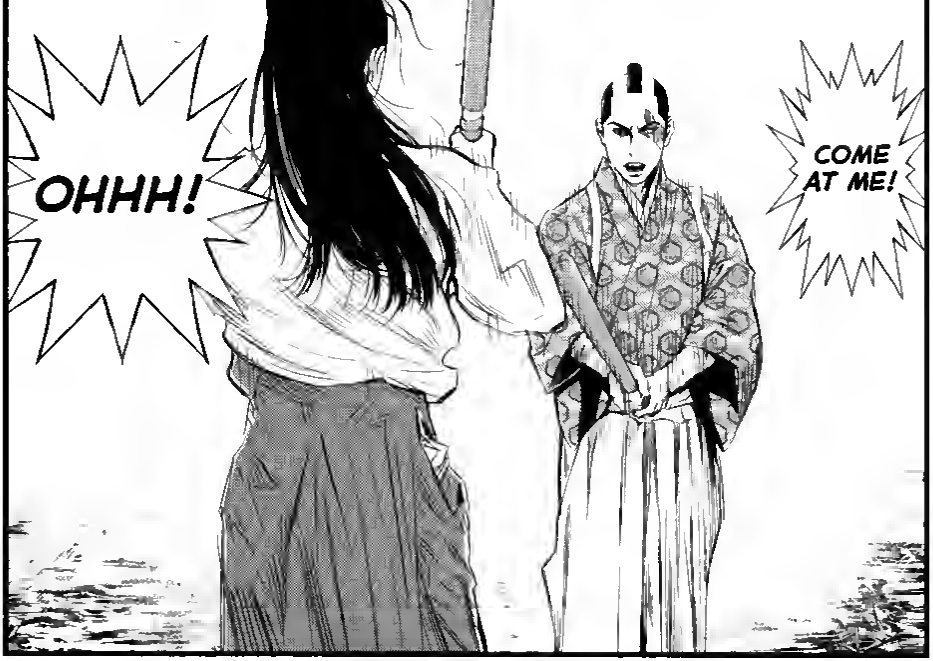

I WAS INDEED MISTAKEN WITH OHAN.
IT IS AS IF SHE HAS TURNED INTO MOTHER.
SHE IS DRIVEN MAOLY TO SPEAK OF FALLING IN LOVE.

HOW I RELISH THE MOMENT OUR SWORDS AND OUR HEARTS EXCHANGE.
THE MAGNIF-ICENCE AND CALLOUSNESS THAT COMES FROM STRIKING MY SWORD—
CAN LOVE BE DESCRIBED WITH WORDS?

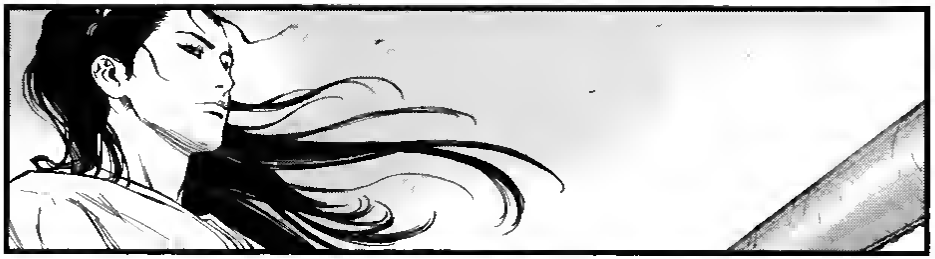

THERE IS A HAPPINESS THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE WORDS...
HERE,
I KNOW THAT FOR SOME REASON, I FIND JOY IN IT.

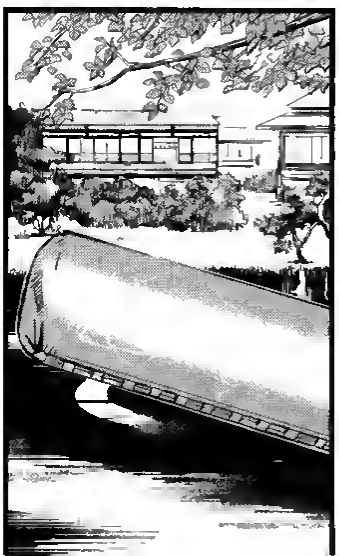

SAMON... I CAN NEVER HOPE TO MATCH YOUR SKILL. THAT IS WHAT I BELIEVE ...
BUT DO NOT RE-STRAIN YOUR-SELF WITH ME.

IEMITSU'S ATTACK PENETRATED SAMON'S CORE.



AT THAT SAME TIME,
SAMON SENSED ONE PARTICULAR PRESENCE.

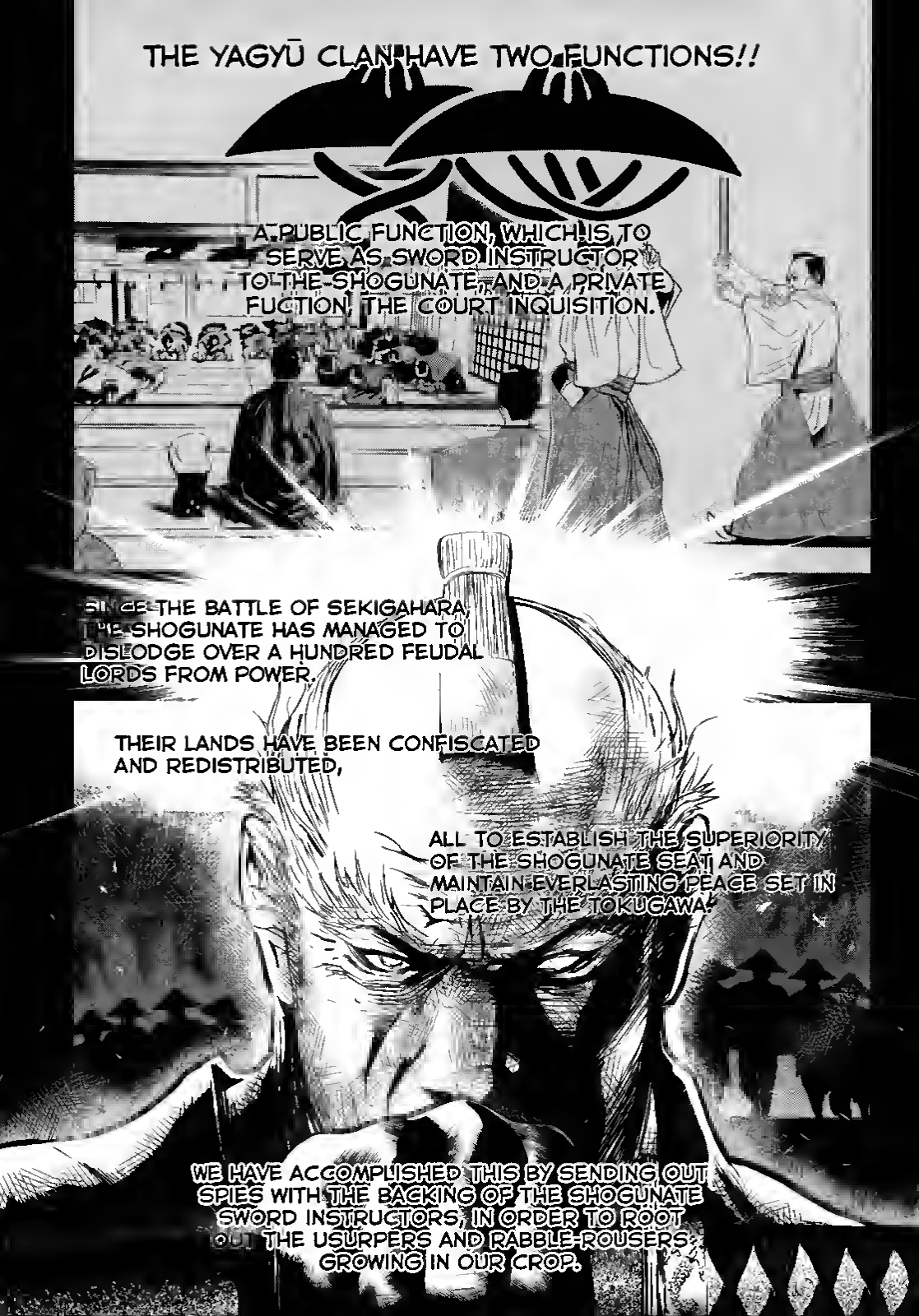




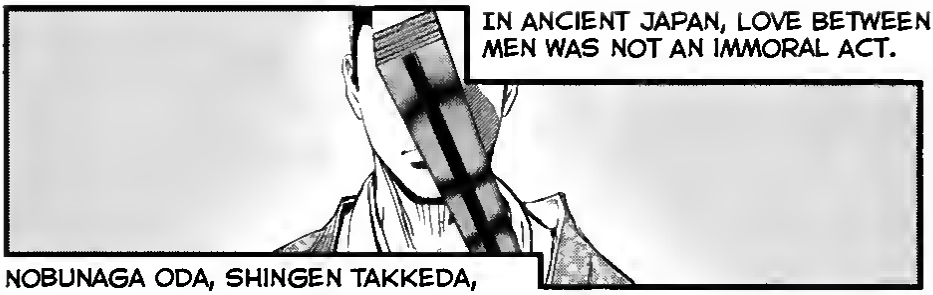
HIDETADA
ŌGOSHO*
AGE
FORTY-NINE
AND FOLLOWING SUIT WITH HIS FATHER, HIDETADA TURNED OVER THE SHOGUNATE SEAT TO IEMITSU, TOOK UP THE NAME OF ŌGOSHO, AND RETIRED TO NISHI NO MARU, THE WESTERN PROVINCE OF EDO CASTLE.
*Since this will come up later as well, when a cherecter hes the last neme Ōgosho, it meens that while they were once eTokugewe Shoqun, when they did bequeeth their position, they would teke up this lest neme es e sort of retirement from both position and name
TO KEEP THE COUNTRY FROM DESCENDING ONCE MORE INTO AN AGE OF WAR, A MERE TWO YEARS AFTER SETTING UP HIS GOVERNMENT, IEYASU TOKUGAWA ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD TURN OVER THE SHOGUNATE SEAT TO HIS SON, HIDETADA, AND THAT THE SEAT WOULD BE A HEREDITARY POSITION.
O CASTLE, NISHI NO MARU

SAMON, MY LORD.
REMIND ME, WHO HAS BEEN CONDUCTING SWORD BOUTS WITH YOU?
I HAVE HEARD PRAISE-WORTHY MENTION OF HIM AS A WARRIOR.
Y-YES, SIR. THAT HE IS...
HIP

IEMITSU!
THAT IS THE SON MUNENORI BOASTS OF THE MOST. YOU MUST NEVER LAY HANDS UPON HIM.
SO HE HAS NOTICED.
...
SURELY YOU ARE AWARE OF HOW NECESSARY THE YAGYŪ ARE TO THE SHOGUNATE.


THE YAGYŪ CLAN HAVE TWO FUNCTIONS!!
A PUBLIC FUNCTION, WHICH IS, TO SERVE AS SWORD INSTRUCTOR TO THE SHOGUNATE, AND A PRIVATE FUCTION, THE COURT INQUISITION.
SINCE THE BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA, THE SHOGUNATE HAS MANAGED TO DISLODGE OVER A HUNDRED FEUDAL LORDS FROM POWER.
THEIR LANDS HAVE BEEN CONFISCATED AND REDISTRIBUTED,
ALL TO ESTABLISH THE SUPERIORITY OF THE SHOGUNATE SEAT AND MAINTAIN EVERLASTING PEACE SET IN PLACE BY THE TOKUGAWA!
WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THIS BY SENDING OUT SPIES WITH THE BACKING OF THE SHOGUNATE SWORD INSTRUCTORS, IN ORDER TO ROOT OUT THE USURPERS AND RABBLE-ROUSERS GROWING IN OUR CROP.

IS IT YOUR INTENTION TO BRING DOWN THE TOKUGAWA ERA WITH YOUR SODOMITIC SLANT!?
ANSWER ME, IEMITSU!
YOU SODOMITE!!!!

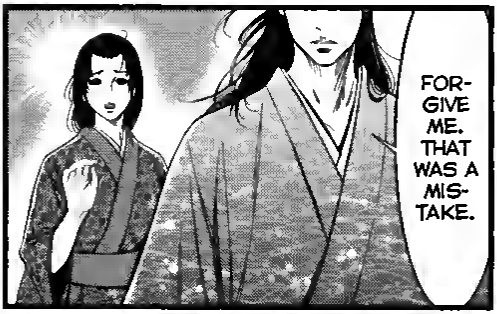


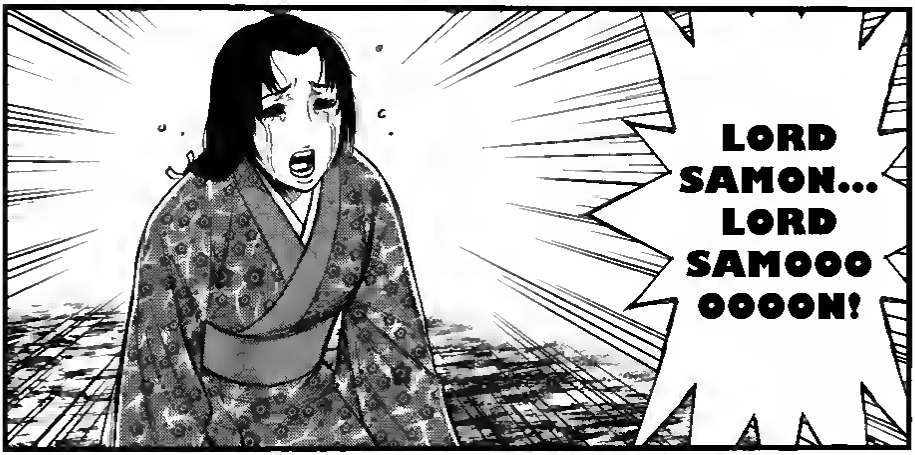
NOBUNAGA ODA, SHINGEN TAKKEDA,
KENSHIN UESUGI, MASAMUNE DATE.
A GREAT MANY MARTIAL ARTISTS WERE LOVERS OF MEN.

WHICH IS WHY THE COUPLING OF MEN WAS NOT
NECESSARILY CONSIDERED AN IMMORAL ACT.

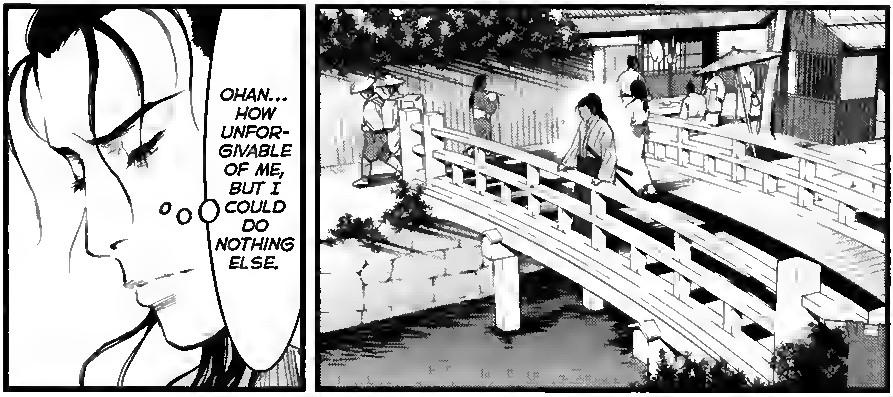
ENSURE THAT YOU DO!
...
I UNDER-STAND.
IN NO WAY COULD THE SHOGUN AND A YAGYŪ INTERTWINE PASSIONATELY, FOR THAT VERY DEED WOULD TRANSFER THE FEUDAL LORD'S HATRED FOR THE SHOGUN ONTO THE YAGYŪ CLAN.
ポタ
ポタ
UNBEARABLE!

I WILL SURPASS YOU, FATHER!
I AM NOT A MERE PUPPET BEARING THE TITLE OF SHOGUN!
I WILL NOT BE SOME TITLE. I WILL BECOME A BONA-FIDE SHOGUN!
SAMON...





OHAN, WHO HAD BEEN RELEASED FROM SERVICE BY SAMON'S MOTHER OFUJI, THREW HERSELF INTO THE RIVER WITHOUT HESITATION...


OHAN... HOW UNFOR-GIVABLE OF ME, BUT I COULD DO NOTHING ELSE.

I COULD NOT CEASE FOCUSING ON THE ANNOY-ANCES OF A WOMAN'S BEHAVIORS WHO I HAD BEDDED.
AND SO TIME PASSED ...

KAN'EI 9TH YEAR (1632) YAGYŪ DOJO
ガッ
ヒュン
ガッ
ヒュン
SAMON, AGE TWENTY
YOUR SKILLS HAVE FURTHER IMPROVED.
THOUGH HE WAS THE SAME AGE AS SAMON, MATAJŪROU WAS THE SON OF MUNENORI'S LEGITIMATE WIFE AND YOUNGER BROTHER OF SAMON.
MATAJŪROU, AGE TWENTY
SUCH A LIAR.

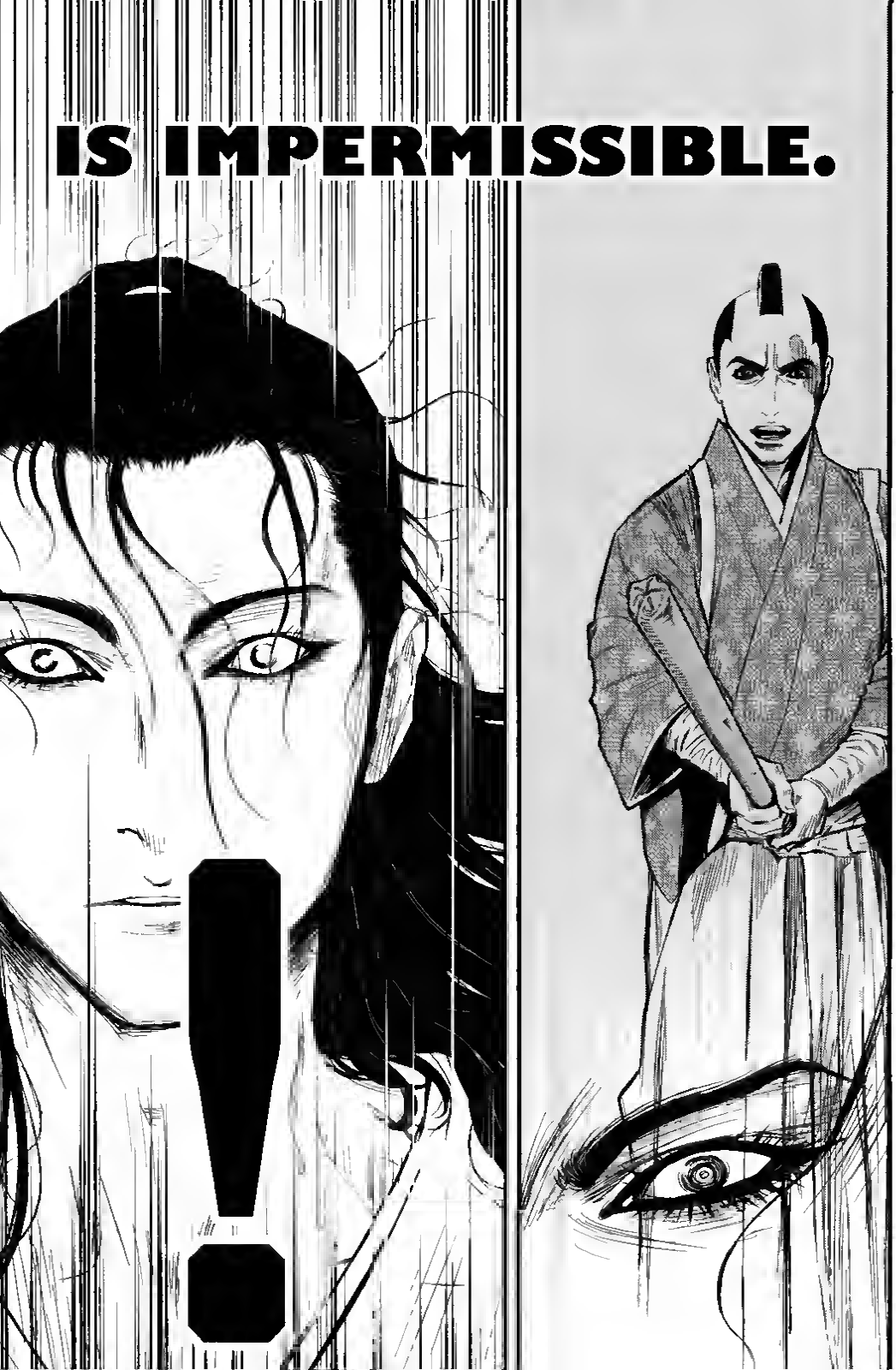
I HAVE NO APPETITE FOR WAR STRATEGY. HOW COULD I POSSIBLY IMPROVE?
THAT IS NOT TRUE.
HOW UN-CONVINCING YOUR PRAISES ARE, SAMON.
BROTHER!
JŪBEI, AGE TWENTY-SIX

...
...YOU HAVE
BEEN SLAYING AGAIN, I SEE...
WHY HAVE YOU COME TO EDO?
CAN I NOT RETURN?
BROTHER...
CAN YOU SMELL THE BLOOD, SAMON?
I WILL SOAK MY HANDS RED, SO THAT OUR CLAN MIGHT PROSPER.

SAMON UNDERSTOOD THE DRIVE GLEAMING IN JŪBEI'S EYES.
AS SOON AS JUBEI WAS DISCHARGED BY IEMITSU HE WAS FORCED TO SHOULDER A PART OF THE RESPONSIBILITY THE YAGYU HELD AS THE SECRET INQUISITION.
IN AN ERA WHERE WAR WAS NO LONGER, JUBEI WAS EVEN NOW ENTHRALLED WITH BATTLE.
YET SURELY, THAT WAS HOW HE WISHED TO LIVE HIS LIFE.
FOR HE WAS THE SORT OF MAN THAT COULD NOT FEEL ALIVE UNLESS HE WAS TAKING LIFE IN EXCHANGE.
OUR SWORD SKILLS WILL NEVER BE EQUAL IF YOU CONTINUE PLAYING SWORD GAMES WITH HIS EXCELLENCY.

SWORD GAMES WITH HIS EXCELLENCY!

BUT TO MOCK—
TO MOCK HIS EXCELLENCY...
YOU HEARD ME.
DO YOU FIND FAULT WITH THE TRUTH?
YOU ARE MISTAKEN!
I- CARE NOT WHAT YOU MAY SAY ABOUT ME.


IS IMPERMISSIBLE.
!

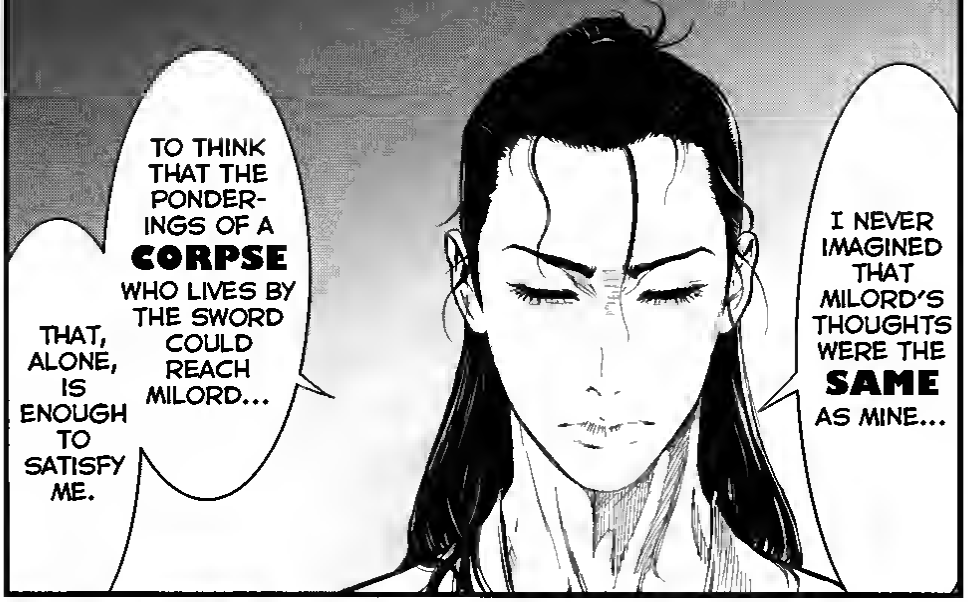
WHY HAS ANGER GRIPPED ME SO STRONG-LY?
IS THIS LOYALTY FOR HIS EX-CELLENCY?... IT IS, BUT THAT IS NOT THE ENTIRE REASON.
AN OPPONENT WHO, WHEN CLASHING SWORDS WITH ME, WAS ABLE TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT EVEN MY MOST UNSEEMLY PARTS.
ONLY HIS EXCEL-LENCY
RES-PONDED TO MY THOUGHTS.
MY THOUGHTS THAT DAY—
SAMON, STRIKE ME!
WITH AN UNRES-TRAINED SWORD!
...THAT WAS...

LORD OGOSHO HAS—!
THE WORST HAS HAP-PENED!
AAAA
HIS LORDSHIP HAS DEPARTED THIS WORLD!
ON JANUARY THE 24TH, KAN'EI 9TH YEAR (1632), HIDETADA PASSED AWAY AT AGE FIFTY-FOUR.
YOUR EXCEL-LENCY... HAS MY DEEPEST CONDO-LENCES.
AND YET, THIS WAS THE EX-PRESSION IEMITSU'S FACE CONVEYED ...

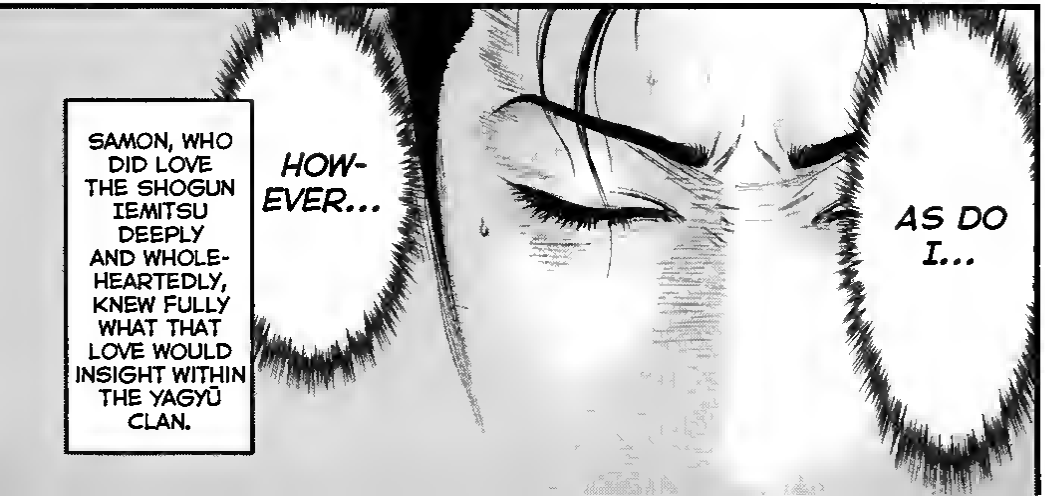
KAN'EI 11TH YEAR, JULY (1634)

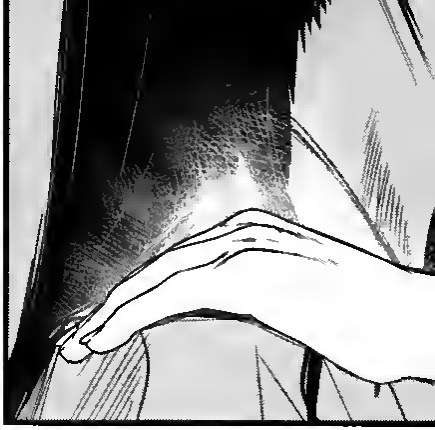
SAMON (22) MADE AN APPEARANCE IN THE PROCESSION.
IEMITSU HAD BECOME A TRUE SHOGUN INSTANTANEOUSLY.
IEMITSU (31) LED A MILITARY FORCE OF 30,000 ON MARCH TO THE CAPITAL.
A DEMONSTRATION OF SORTS TO SHOW THE IMPERIAL COURT THE SUBSTANTIAL INFLUENCE THE SHOGUN HAD IN TERMS OF BOTH MILITARY AND POLITICAL POWER.

ON THE RETURN TRIP, AT THE KUNOUZAN TOUSHOU SHRINE WHERE IEYASU DAIGONGEN WAS FIRST LAID TO REST—


I NEVER IMAGINED THAT MILORD'S THOUGHTS WERE THE SAME AS MINE...
TO THINK THAT THE PONDER-INGS OF A CORPSE WHO LIVES BY THE SWORD COULD REACH MILORD...
THAT, ALONE, IS ENOUGH TO SATISFY ME.

ARE THEY THE SAME?...
SAMON, I LOVE YOU.


AS DO I...
HOW-EVER...
SAMON, WHO DID LOVE THE SHOGUN IEMITSU DEEPLY AND WHOLE-HEARTEDLY, KNEW FULLY WHAT THAT LOVE WOULD INSIGHT WITHIN THE YAGYŪ CLAN.



HE WAS SHAKING.

SODOMY, WHERE A MAN LOVES ANOTHER MAN, WAS A FORM OF LOVE IN ANCIENT JAPAN...

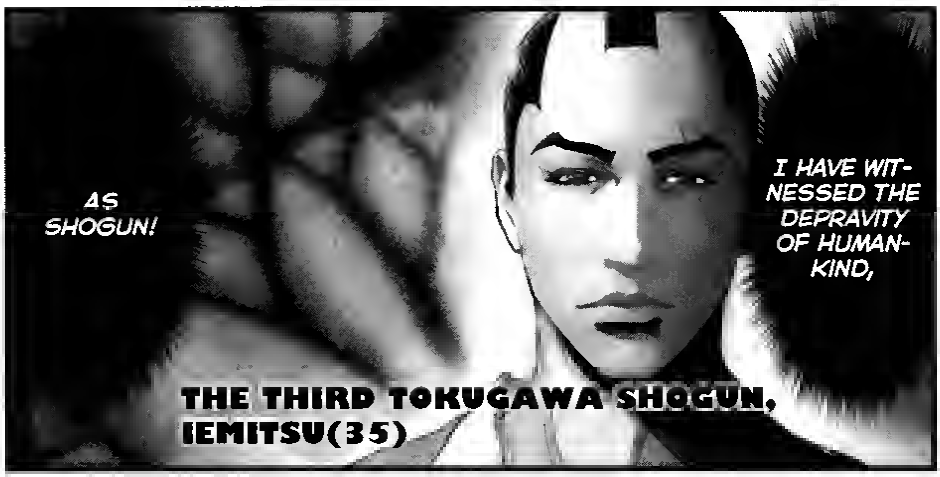
ANY VERY SOON AFTER, SAMON BECAME THE CENTER OF JEALOUSY.

THEY WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES EITHER. THE MEN FROM THE KOSHOU GROUP WHO WERE IN CLOSE RELATION TO IEMITSU WERE ENVELOPED BY AN INTENSE JEALOUSY.
THOUGH NOT YET CONSIDERED HIS ENEMIES, THIS JEALOUSY WOULD COME FROM THE WOMEN IN IEMITSU'S HAREM THAT WERE FIRST IN LINE TO BEAR HIS HEIR.
AND THESE VYING SUITORS WERE UNMATCHED SWORDSMEN.
IT WAS AS IF SAMON HAD 10,000 RIVALS FOR IEMITSU'S AFFECTIONS.
THE JEALOUSIES OF THOSE WITH GRUDGES RAN DEEP, AND THAT JEALOUSY
WAS DIRECTED INTENSELY AT THE YAGYŪ CLAN...

Chapter Two: Samon (End)

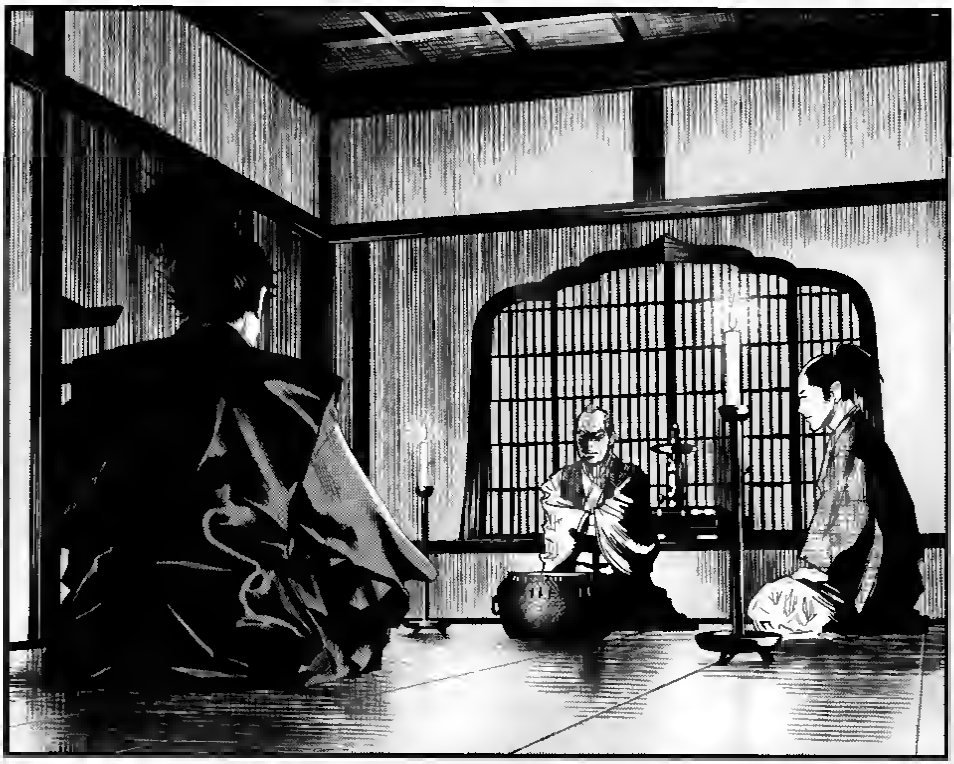
THE SHOGUN, IEMITSU, HAD A THOUGHT.

THIS WORLD IS REPULSIVE!



Chapter Three: Munenori

KAN'EI YEAR
15 (1638)
EDO YAGYU
MANSION



FATHER!!
YOU CANNOT POSSIBLY ALLOW THIS TO CONTINUE!
MUNENORI "TAJIMA NO KAMI" YAGYŪ (68)

SAMON IS TRULY A DISGRACE TO OUR LINEAGE.
HAVE YOU HEARD WHAT THOSE FEUDAL LORDS FACING ANNIHILATION HAVE BEEN WHISPERING IN THE CASTLE? OF THE RUMORS THAT CHALLENGE OUR GLORY!?
MITSUYOSHI JŪBEI YAGYŪ (32)

EDO CASTLE
SIR TAJIMA IS BLESSED WITH A MOST AGREEABLE SON.
EVEN THE GLORY-SEEKER OF THAT CLAN COULD NEVER BECOME THE GREATEST ASS IN ALL THE REALM.

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*Noh: Classical Japanese musical drama performed since the 14th century.

MATAJŪROU IS INFATUATED WITH NOH AND WOMEN,
SAMON IS THE OBJECT OF SCORN AND JEALOUSY DUE TO HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS EXCELLENCY,
AND THOUGH JŪBEI IS THE LEGITIMATE SUCCESSOR, HE HAS NOT A SHRED OF CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR CLAN...
HIS ONLY CONCERN IS TO SHARPEN HIS BLADE THROUGH COMBAT...
LIKE MY FATHER!!

Now is our final chance to regain the 3,000 koku* that we once held!
Father! Our clan must stand at attention for Lord Tokugawa!!
KEICHŌ ERA YEAR 5 (1600)
SEKISHŪSAI YAGYŪ (73)
MUNENORI YAGYŪ (30)

*Note: In feudal Japan, a koku was basically a rice field. Wiki has a good article on Koku for those inclined.

THE ONLY PERSON OBSESSED WITH THE SWORD WAS SEKISHŪSAI
WHERE STRATEGY AND WEAPONRY GREW EVER LARGER AND MORE ROBUST ON THE BATTLEFIELD, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SWORD WAS CONSIDERED BY ALL TO BE AN ANTIQUATED TOOL.

THEIR LAND HAD BEEN SEIZED BY THE NATION WIDE LAND SURVEY (CONDUCTED BY HIDEYOSHI TOYOTOMI).
THE YAGYŪ HAD FALLEN TO UTTER RUIN
FORMER TERRITORIES...
BEFORE THE FATEFUL BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA, MUNENORI HAD JOURNEYED TO THE YAGYŪ VALLEY.

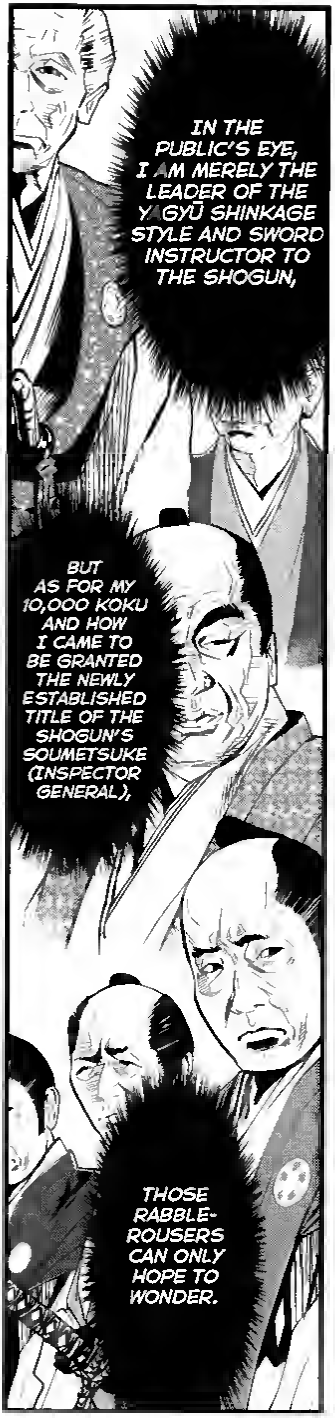
Sir Tokugawa considers the five hundred warriors of the Yagyū valley to be cannon fodder.
I will not offer up our soldiers.
As long as I remain in this world, the Shinkage style shall not be expunged.
Are you foolish enough to believe you are a worthy successor of the Shinkage with your skill?
The successor of the Yagyū clan will be my grand-child, Heisuke!
Not one soldier will be granted to a failure such as you!!

HE WAS HUMILIATED!
HIS SOLE DESIRE WAS TO REGAIN THOSE FORMER TERRITORIES AND WIN OVER HIS VEXATIOUS FATHER.
MUNENORI'S VOW TO REVIVE THE YAGYŪ CLAN WAS EVER MORE DETERMINED.
AFTER THE BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA, MUNENORI WOULD SOMEHOW MANAGE TO BECOME HIDETADA'S MOST TRUSTED RETAINER.
THE REASON HE MANAGED THIS WAS BECAUSE, ONCE THE COUNTRY HAD BEEN UNIFIED, THE YAGYŪ'S ABILITY TO GATHER INFORMATION BECAME NECESSARY.
THAT BY THE 13TH YEAR OF THE KAN'EI ERA (1636), HE HAD AMASSED OVER 10,000 KOKU WHICH ELEVATED HIM TO THE TITLE OF FEUDAL LORD.
MUNENORI BECAME THE HEAD OF THE EDO YAGYŪ BRANCH, INCREASED THEIR TERRITORY,

HOW FRIGHTENING AN EXISTENCE THAT IS—
AND EVEN I MUST ADMIT...
EVEN THE GREAT FEUDAL LORDS FEAR MY STARE. SURELY WHAT I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED IS THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT A HUMAN CAN OBTAIN.
THE GREATEST ASS!!

YET THE GREATER MYSTERY FOR THEM IS SAMON'S 2,000 KOKU! 2,000 KOKU!!

RUMORS ARE SURE TO CIRCULATE OF HOW THAT WHELP HAS BEEN ELEVATED TO THE POSITION OF HIS EXCELLENCY'S LOVER AND HOW HIS SOCIAL STANDING HAS SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED BECAUSE OF IT!


IN THE PUBLIC'S EYE, I AM MERELY THE LEADER OF THE YAGYŪ SHINKAGE STYLE AND SWORD INSTRUCTOR TO THE SHOGUN,
BUT AS FOR MY 10,000 KOKU AND HOW I CAME TO BE GRANTED THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED TITLE OF THE SHOGUN'S SOUMETSUKE (INSPECTOR GENERAL),
THOSE RABBLE-ROUSERS CAN ONLY HOPE TO WONDER.

WHAT TROUBLES YOU, SAMON?
NOTHING...

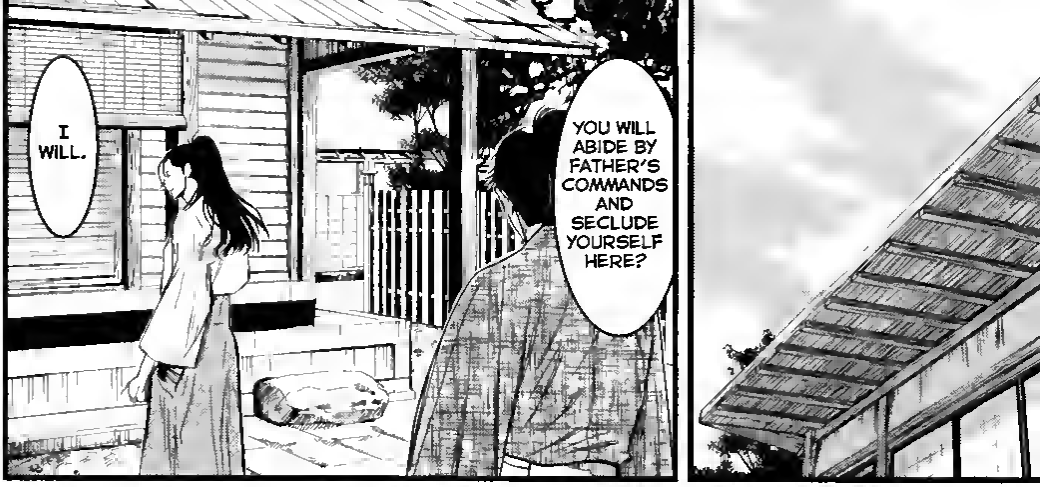
I DESIRE ONLY YOUR HAPPINESS,
AND SURELY THAT WILL NOT LEAD TO GOOD...

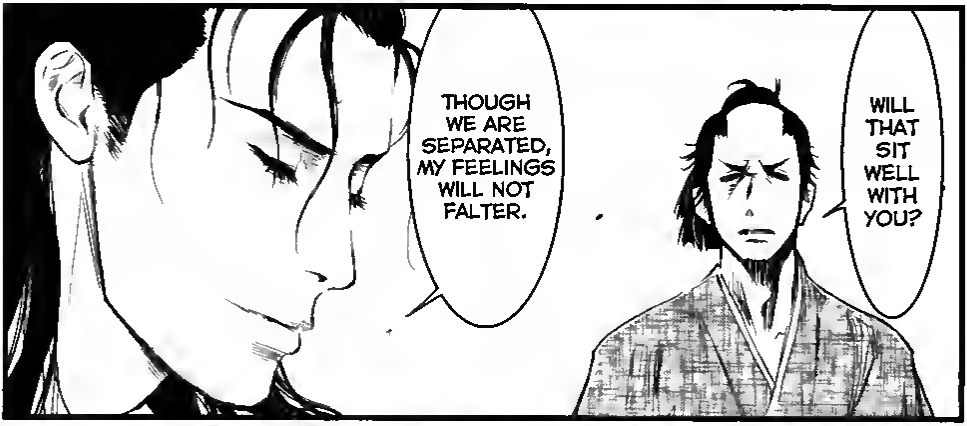
YOU MEAN TO SEPARATE THE TWO LOVERS? HOW SAD. I PITY THEM.
YOUR HEART CAN WEEP FOR THEM ALL IT WANTS!

ANNOUNCE THAT HE IS ILL AND SECLUDE SAMON IN THE YAGYU VALLEY! THAT IS OUR ONLY OPTION!!

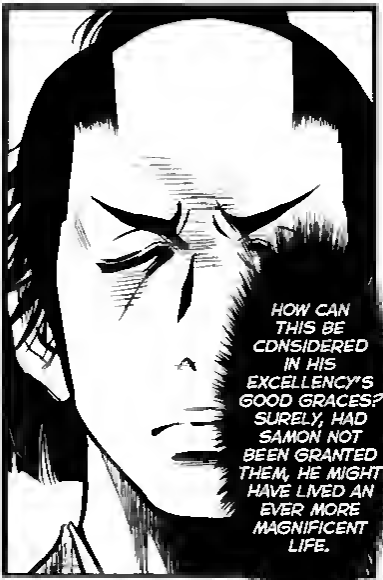
SHOULD SAMON OBJECT TO THIS, I SHALL CUT HIM IN HALF WITH ONE STROKE OF MY SWORD.

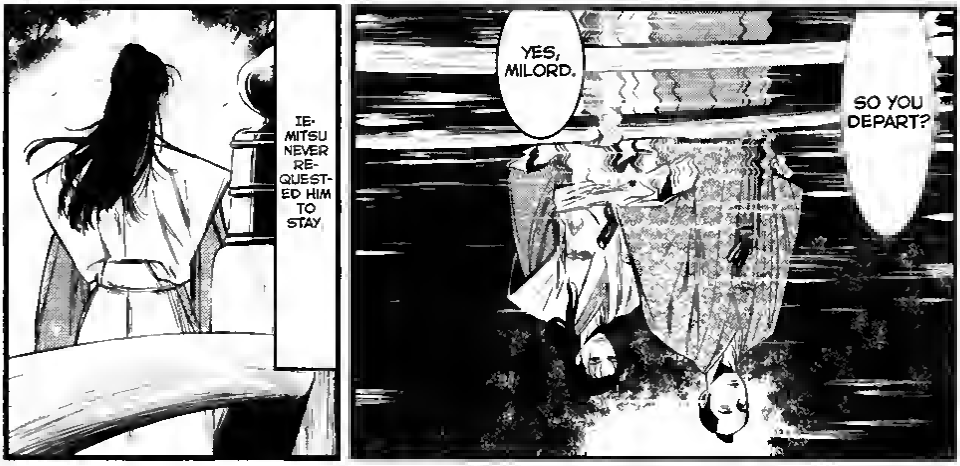
...WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
YET I WONDER WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO SLAY HIM?
WHAT A PERFECT PRETEXT THAT IS, DO YOU NOT AGREE, BROTHER?
HOWEVER ...
YOU MAY OVERWHELM HIM IN TERMS OF STRENGTH, SINCE YOU HAVE SLAIN MANY.
STRENGTH ALONE DOES NOT DETERMINE THE OUTCOME OF A DUEL.


I WILL.
YOU WILL ABIDE BY FATHER'S COMMANDS AND SECLUDE YOURSELF HERE?

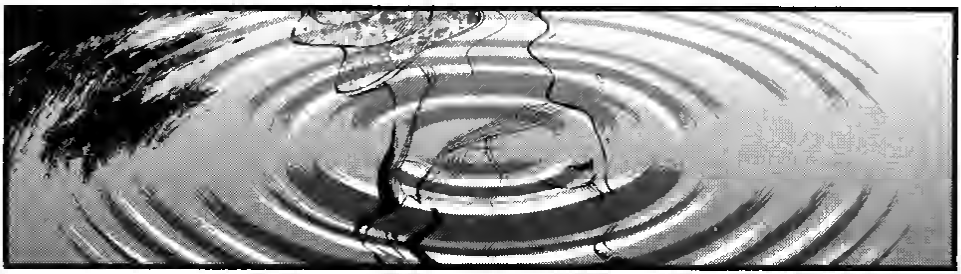

THOUGH WE ARE SEPARATED, MY FEELINGS WILL NOT FALTER.
WILL THAT SIT WELL WITH YOU?

HIS FEELINGS TOWARD HIS EXCELLENCY ARE THAT SERIOUS...


HOW CAN THIS BE CONSIDERED IN HIS EXCELLENCY'S GOOD GRACES? SURELY, HAD SAMON NOT BEEN GRANTED THEM, HE MIGHT HAVE LIVED AN EVER MORE MAGNIFICENT LIFE.


IE-MITSU NEVER RE-QUEST-ED HIM TO STAY.
SO YOU DEPART?
YES, MILORD.

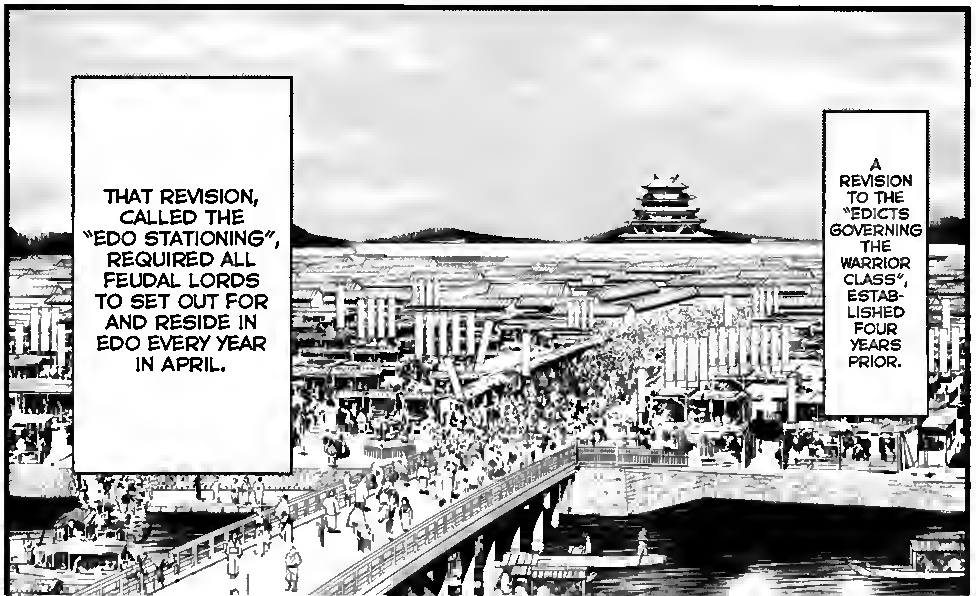
FOR IEMITSU READILY KNEW THAT SAMON, MORE THAN ANYONE, HATED BEING TREATED SO FEMININELY.

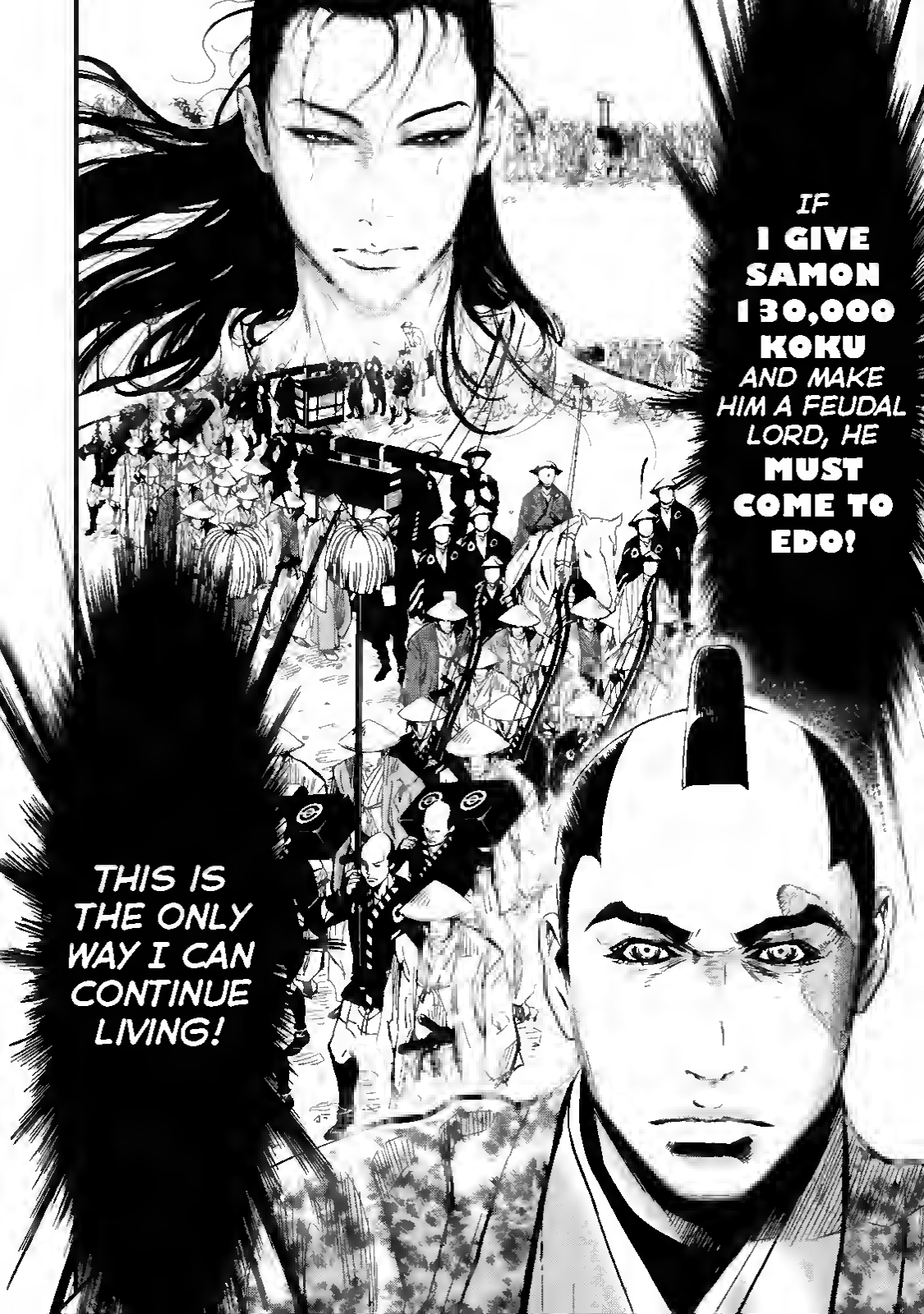


AND SO HE THOUGHT THAT THEIR END HAD COME.

KAN'EI 16TH YEAR (1639)
WHAT!? 130,000 KOKU!? 130,000 KOKUUU UUUU!!?

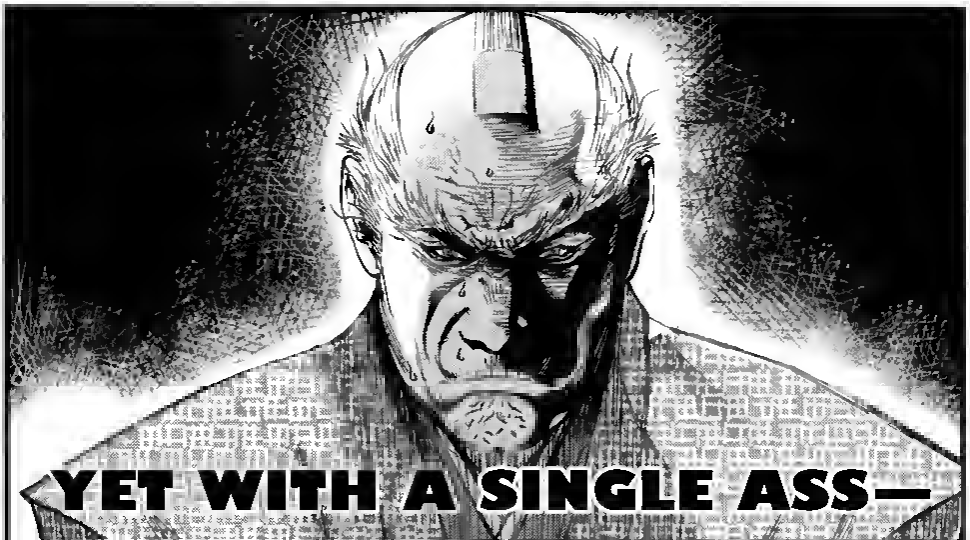
SAMON, I HAVE COME UP WITH A WAY THAT WE MIGHT MEET IN GRANDEUR.

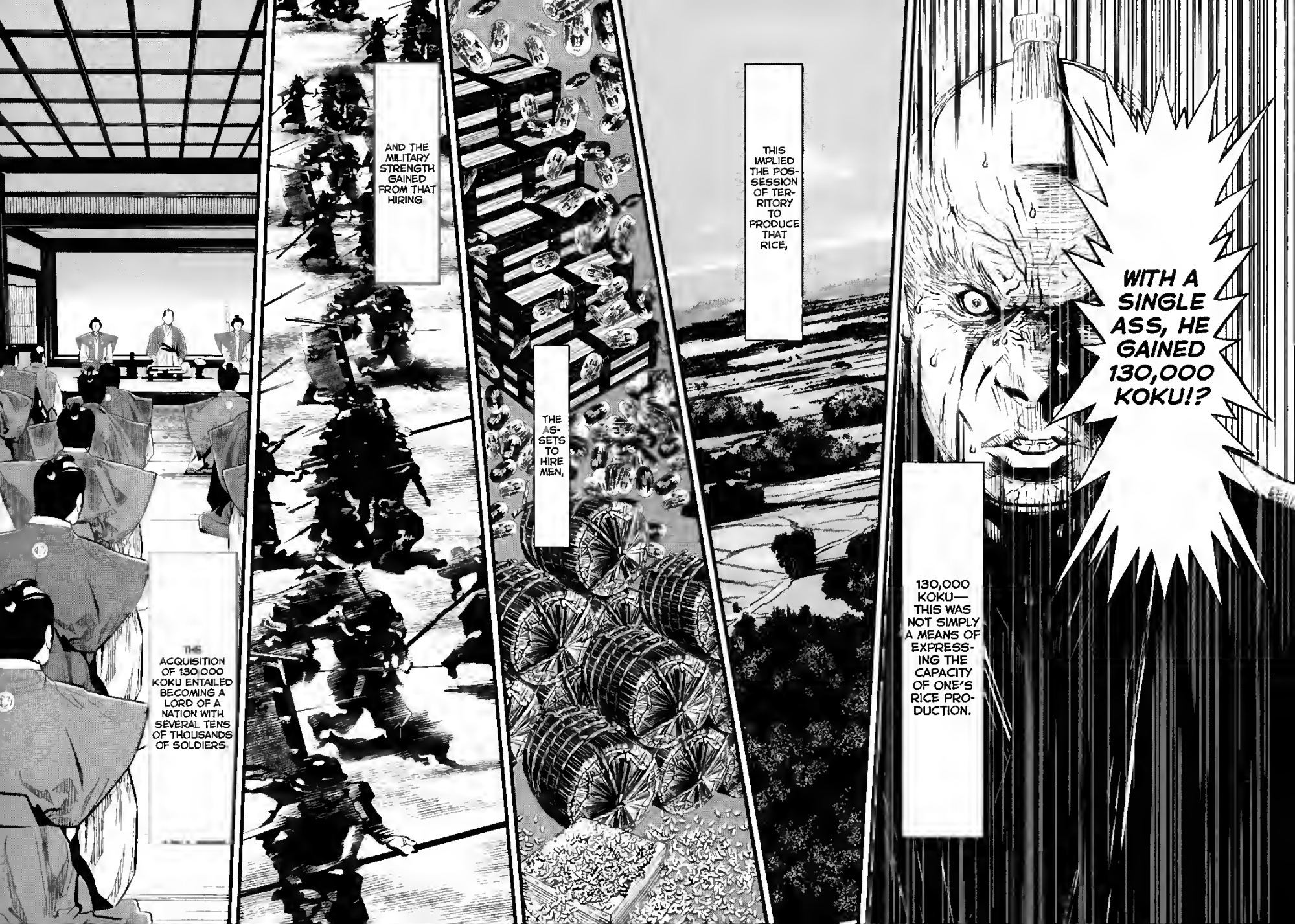

A REVISION TO THE "EDICTS GOVERNING THE WARRIOR CLASS", ESTABLISHED FOUR YEARS PRIOR.
THAT REVISION, CALLED THE "EDO STATIONING", REQUIRED ALL FEUDAL LORDS TO SET OUT FOR AND RESIDE IN EDO EVERY YEAR IN APRIL.


IF I GIVE SAMON 130,000 KOKU AND MAKE HIM A FEUDAL LORD, HE MUST COME TO EDO!
THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN CONTINUE LIVING!

I HAVE THROWN AWAY MY HONOR AS A MARTIAL ARTIST, STAINED MYSELF WITH SUCH LOWLY ACTIVITIES AS SPYING AND ASSASSINATION,
TO REVIVE THE YAGYŪ CLAN WITHOUT SWORDSMANSHIP,

10,000 KOKU, THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM NECESSARY TO HOLD THE TITLE OF FEUDAL LORD.
ALL TO COLLECT 10,000 KOKU—


YET WITH A SINGLE ASS—


THIS ACQUISITION OF 130,000 KOKU ENTAILED BECOMING A LORD OF A NATION WITH SEVERAL TENS OF THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS.
AND THE MILITARY STRENGTH GAINED FROM THAT HIRING
THE ASSETS TO HIRE MEN,
THIS IMPLIED THE POSSESSION OF TERRITORY TO PRODUCE THAT RICE,
130,000 KOKU— THIS WAS NOT SIMPLY A MEANS OF EXPRESSING THE CAPACITY OF ONE'S RICE PRODUCTION.
WITH A SINGLE ASS, HE GAINED 130,000 KOKU!?

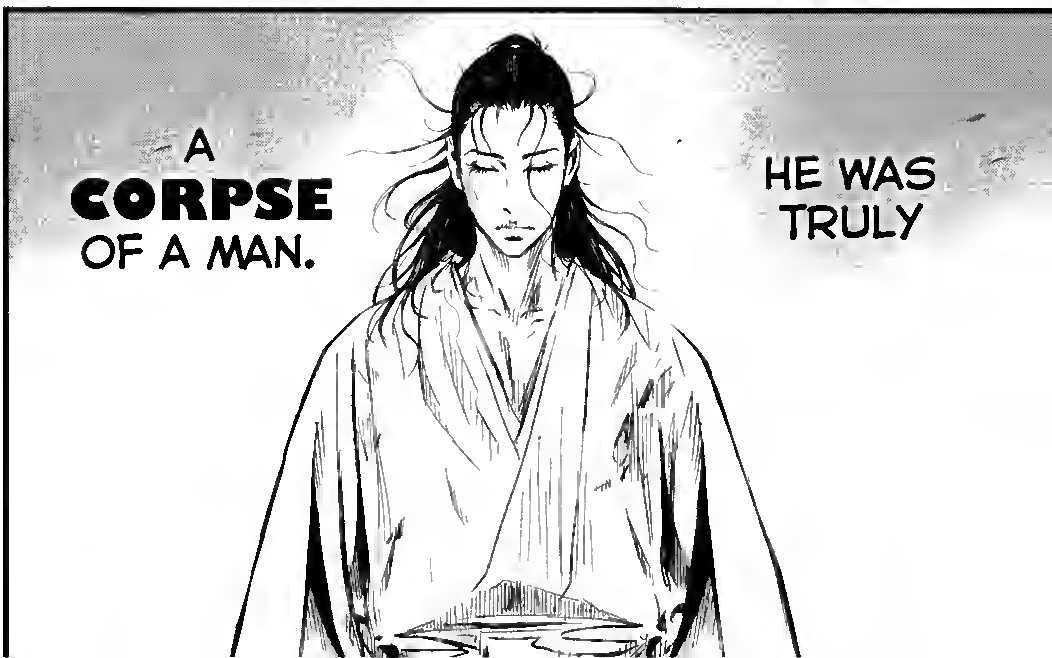
THEN, THAT ANGER WILL BE DIRECTED AT NOT ONLY HIS EXCELLENCY,
BUT AT THE YAGYŪ! IT WILL BE FOCUSED ON OUR CLAN!
AND EVEN SHDULD I ALLOW IT, THE ENTIRE MILITARY FORCE RECEIVING STIPENDS FROM THE SHOGUN WILL SURELY BE DPPOSED!
THIS CANNOT BE TOLERATED!
JŪBEIIII!
WHEN THAT HAPPENS, THE DES-TRUCTION OF THE YAGYŪ WILL BE INEVI-TABLE!!

I DO.
YOU UNDER-STAND, RIGHT?

OH, HOW WONDERFUL THAT WOULD BE.
SAMON,
I LOOK BACK ON MY LIFE AND SEE IT AS SOMETHING SO UNSEEM-LY...
IF I MIGHT DISCARD MY MANY TITLES INCLUDING THAT OF SHOGUN,
AND BE WITH YOU IN BOTH TIMES OF JOY... AND SORROW...

IEMITSU'S FEELINGS WOULD HAVE TO BE ACCEPTED.

WHILE HE WAS STILL BREATHING, THOSE FEELINGS WOULD BE ACTED UPON. DESPITE THE REMORSE THEY WOULD CAUSE.
AND WHILE IT WAS NECESSARY TO ACCEPT THEM, SAMON ALSO UNDERSTOOD THAT HE WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO LIVE.


A CORPSE OF A MAN.
HE WAS TRULY

Chapter Three: Munenori (End)

JŪBEI YAGYŪ

TO ERADICATE HIS YOUNGER BROTHER SAMON.
HE WAS HEADED FOR THE YAGYU VILLIAGE.

HE FELT NOT A SHRED OF WOE.
YET, FOR HIM

Chapter Four: The Willow Branch Style

KAN'EI YEAR 16TH, JUNE THE 5TH,
LATE AT NIGHT,
SAMON'S RESIDENCE.

YOU ARE QUITE LATE, BROTHER.

THE WIND WAS A BIT CALMER LAST NIGHT.
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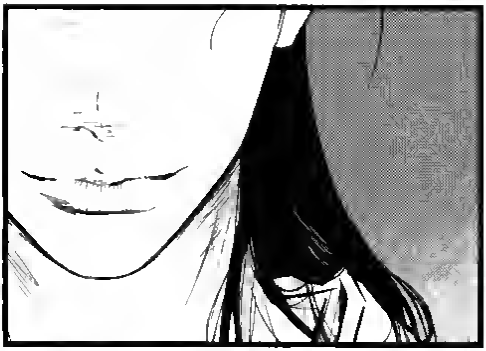
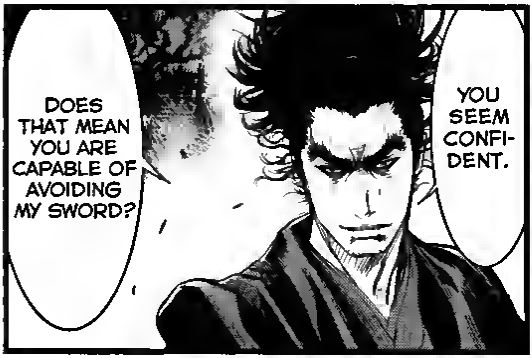
ス
HAD THE GULL TO WONDER IF I COULD SLAY YOU.
MATAJŪ-ROU...

HIS SKILL HAS IMPROVED.




YOU SEEM CONFIDENT.
DOES THAT MEAN YOU ARE CAPABLE OF AVOIDING MY SWORD?

IF I MUST DIE AT THIS AGE, I HAVE BEEN THINKING
THAT I WANT TO LEAVE SOMETHING BEHIND IN THIS WORLD.

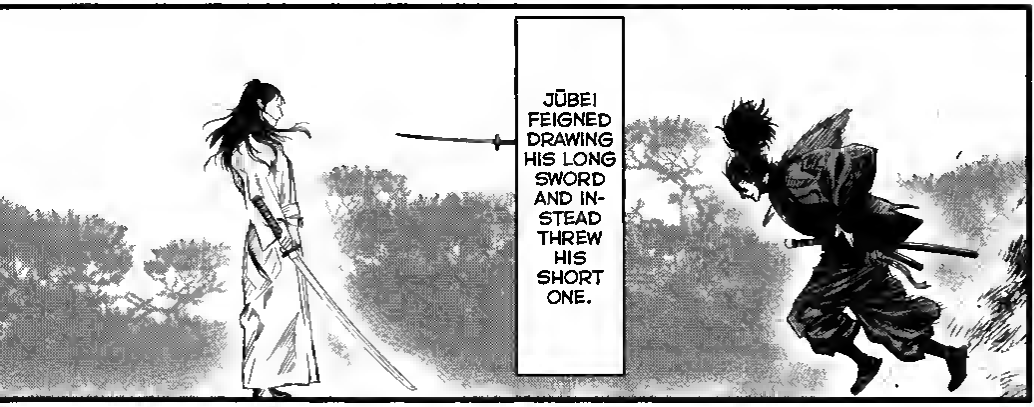
OHHH?

I AM TWENTY-SEVEN.

THE WILLOW BRANCH STYLE—
A SWORD THAT MIMICS THE
BRANCH OF A WILLOW TREE.
THIS WILLOW BRANCH DOES NOT BREAK WHEN
PUSHED BACK, BUT SNAPS WITH FULL FORCE
AND SHALL GOUGE MY BROTHER'S RIGHT EYE.

I HAVE SEEN WHAT TRUE COMBAT IS.
I HAVE SEEN THE BOTTOM-LESS CHASM OF BLOOD COLLECTING IN THE UNDERBELLY OF THIS WORLD.
HOW SICK-ENING.
YOUR SWORD IS MERE DALLIANCE.
YOU WILL FIND THAT OUT.
AS YOU WISH.
ALLOW ME A TASTE OF THIS WILLOW BRANCH STYLE OF YOURS.
WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN?

ジャリン


JŪBEI FEIGNED DRAWING HIS LONG SWORD AND INSTEAD THREW HIS SHORT ONE.

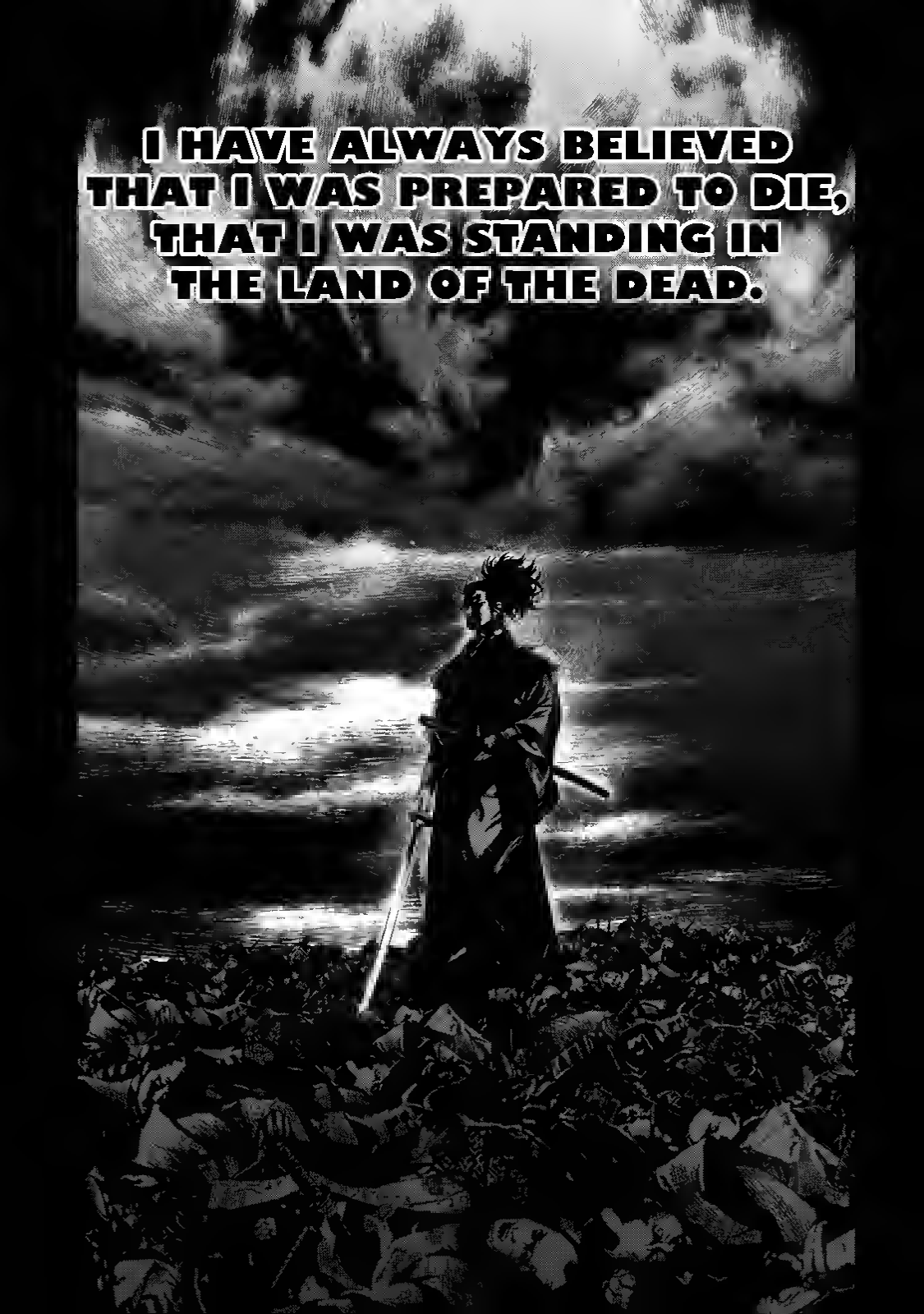
THIS CAUSED SAMON TO THINK, 'THIS IS A REAL FIGHT?', AND REGRETTING HIS OWN INADEQUACIES, HE WAS CONTENT TO DIE.
JŪBEI DESIRED BATTLES TO THE DEATH AND DID NOT MAKE HIS ABILITIES KNOWN IN A FAIR MANNER.

QUITE THE SLIP-PERY ONE.
BUT I ALREADY EXPECTED THAT POS-SIBILITY.
SAMON!
YOU DIE
HERE!

ヒュー…
!!
IMPOSSIBLE!
HOW CAN HE DO THAT!?

AS IF WE WERE STILL TRAINING?
HOW CAN HE DODGE MY SWORD
MY SWORD HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED BY THE YAGYŪ VILLAGE
AND HAS AIDED MY ESCAPE OF DEATH ON COUNTLESS OCCASIONS.
HOW DARE HE DODGE!

COMPARED WITH ALL OTHER FIGHTS TO THE DEATH THAT I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN, THIS PARTICULAR DUEL IS—
WHAT IS THIS SENSE OF UN-EASE?
SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
ON THE CONTRARY, IT HAS MADE ME FEEL ALIVE AND CAUSED ME GREAT EXUBERANCE TO BE SO INTIMATE WITH DEATH.
I HAVE NEVER ONCE FEARED DEATH.

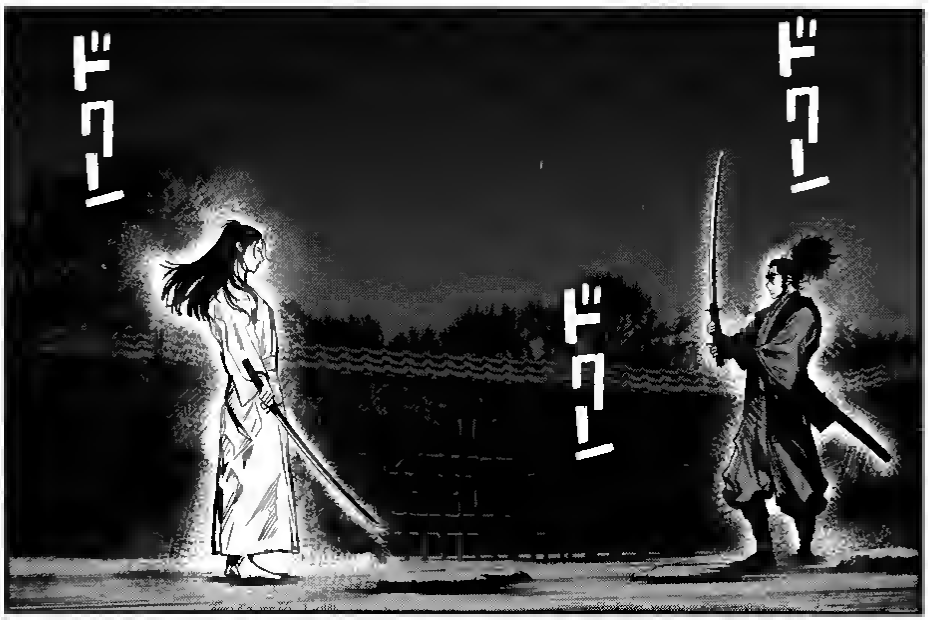

I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED
THAT I WAS PREPARED TO DIE,
THAT I WAS STANDING IN
THE LAND OF THE DEAD.

THIS MAN DOES NOT FEEL JOY.
YET THE JOY I HAVE FOUND THROUGH FIGHTING AND THE AIM FOR STRENGTH IS AN ATTACHMENT TO LIFE.
AM I TRULY FIGHTING SOMEONE LIVING?

IS THIS WHAT A CORPSE IS LIKE!!?

hah
hah
hah
hah
YET WHATEVER PROGRESS I MAKE IN SWORDSMANSHIP, I WILL NOT WIN IN TODAY'S SOCIETY JUST AS I WOULD NOT HAVE IN TIMES OF WAR.
THE BATTLES THAT I HAVE PARTICIPATED IN HAVE NEVER ADHERED TO THE IDEALS OF SWORDSMANSHIP.

WHAT HAVE I TRULY SUCCEEDED AT? HAVE I REALLY GAINED STRENGTH?



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I THINK THE TIME IS RIGHT TO SETTLE THIS. THE MANOR ATTEND-ANTS WILL SOON BE ALERTED.
ドクン
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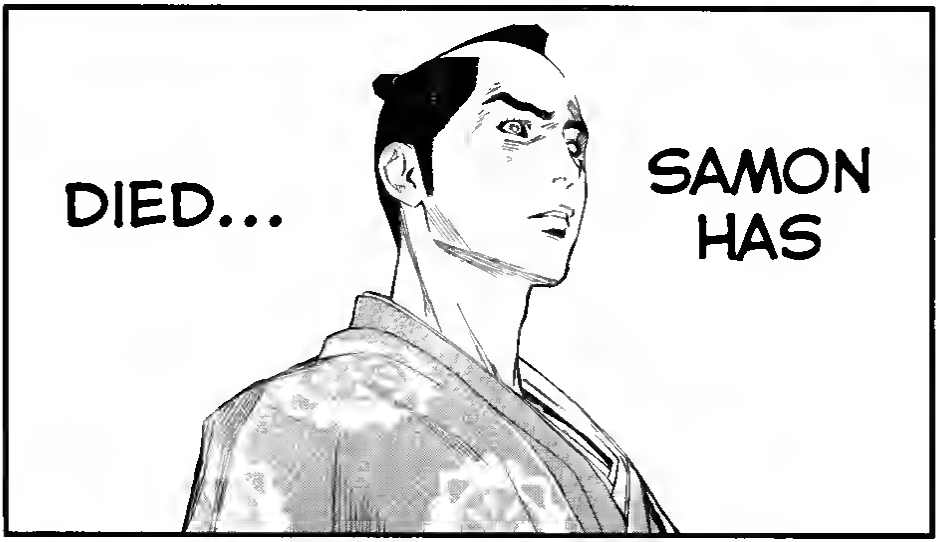
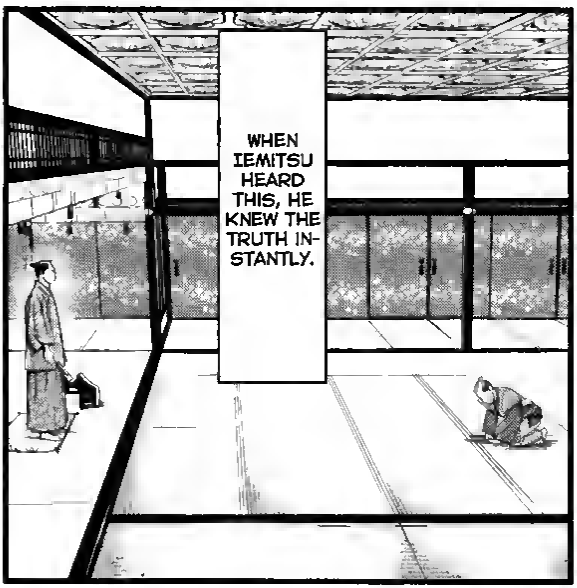
EXACTLY AS YOU DECLARED!
MY RIGHT EYE!?

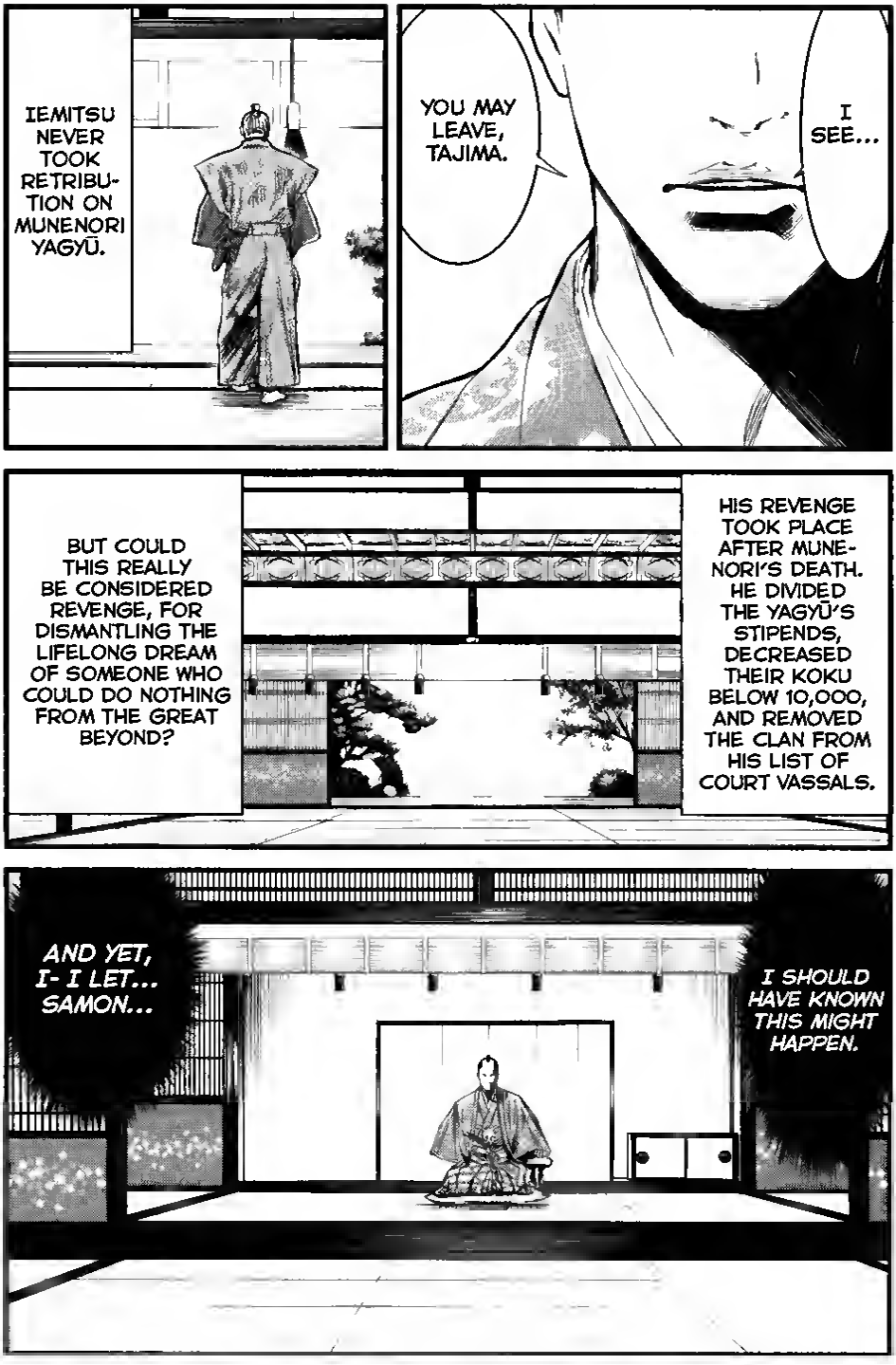
SAMON!
DELIGHTFUL...

THE WILLOW BRANCH STYLE WILL BE ENGRAVED IN MY MIND.
SAMON TOMONORI YAGYU, KAN'EI YEAR 16, 5TH OF JULY, PASSED ON AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-SEVEN.
THE CAUSE OF DEATH, ILL-NESS.

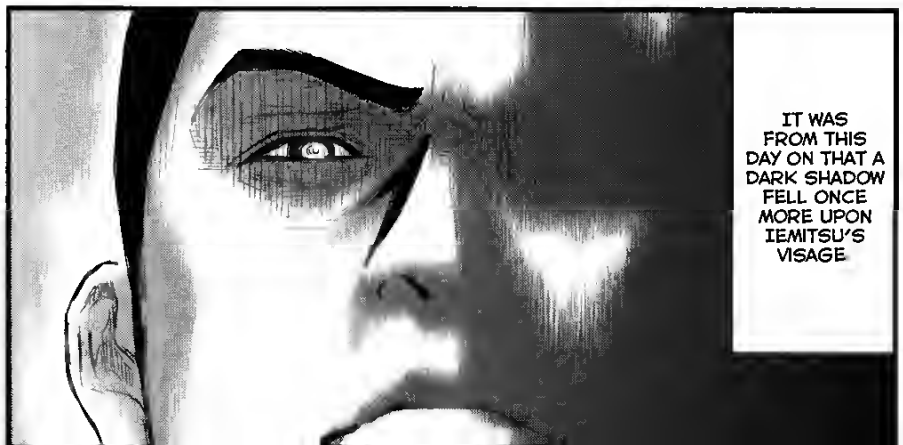

DIED...
SAMON HAS


WHEN IEMITSU HEARD THIS, HE KNEW THE TRUTH IN-STANTLY.

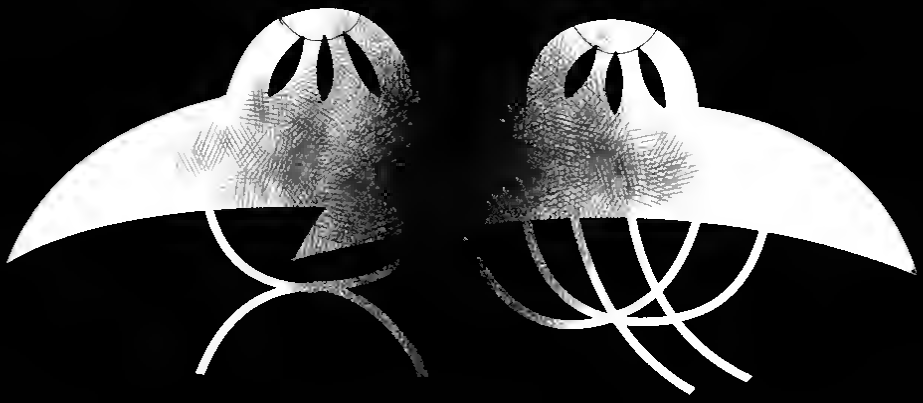
MILORD.
FROM ILLNESS...


IEMITSU NEVER TOOK RETRIBUTION ON MUNENORI YAGYŪ.
YOU MAY LEAVE, TAJIMA.
I SEE...
BUT COULD THIS REALLY BE CONSIDERED REVENGE, FOR DISMANTLING THE LIFELONG DREAM OF SOMEONE WHO COULD DO NOTHING FROM THE GREAT BEYOND?
HIS REVENGE TOOK PLACE AFTER MUNENORI'S DEATH. HE DIVIDED THE YAGYŪ'S STIPENDS, DECREASED THEIR KOKU BELOW 10,000, AND REMOVED THE CLAN FROM HIS LIST OF COURT VASSALS.
AND YET, I- I LET... SAMON...
I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN THIS MIGHT HAPPEN.

THOSE WHO CUT YOU DOWN...


IT WAS FROM THIS DAY ON THAT A DARK SHADOW FELL ONCE MORE UPON IEMITSU'S VISAGE

I WONDER, MIGHT THEY EVER DREAM AGAIN...

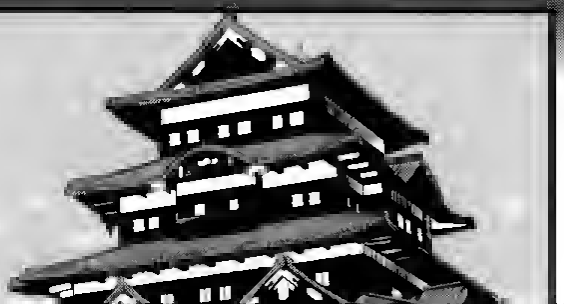


Chapter Four: The Willow Branch Style (End)

HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN CLAD IN A SINISTER QUALITY.
SUCH A STRANGE QUALITY IT WAS, LIKE THAT OF AN IMPERISHABLE DEMON.

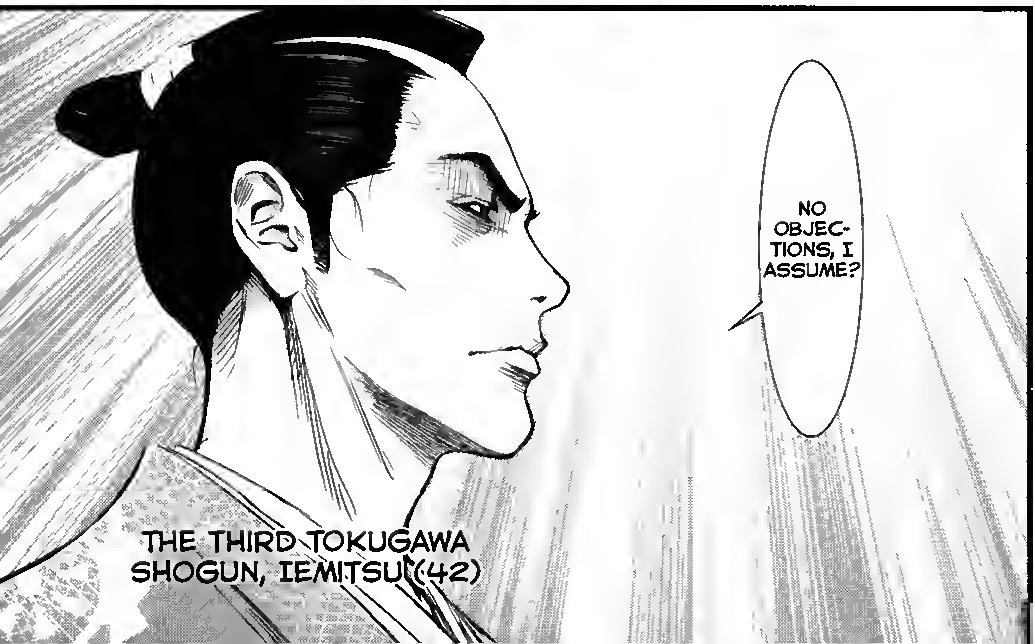
THIS IS THE TALE OF THE DEATH OF JŪBEI YAGYŪ.
NOW, HOWEVER, HE WAS A MAN TREADING IN THE WORLD BEYOND...

SEVEN YEARS HAVE PASSED. IT IS SHŌHŌ YEAR 3 (1646).

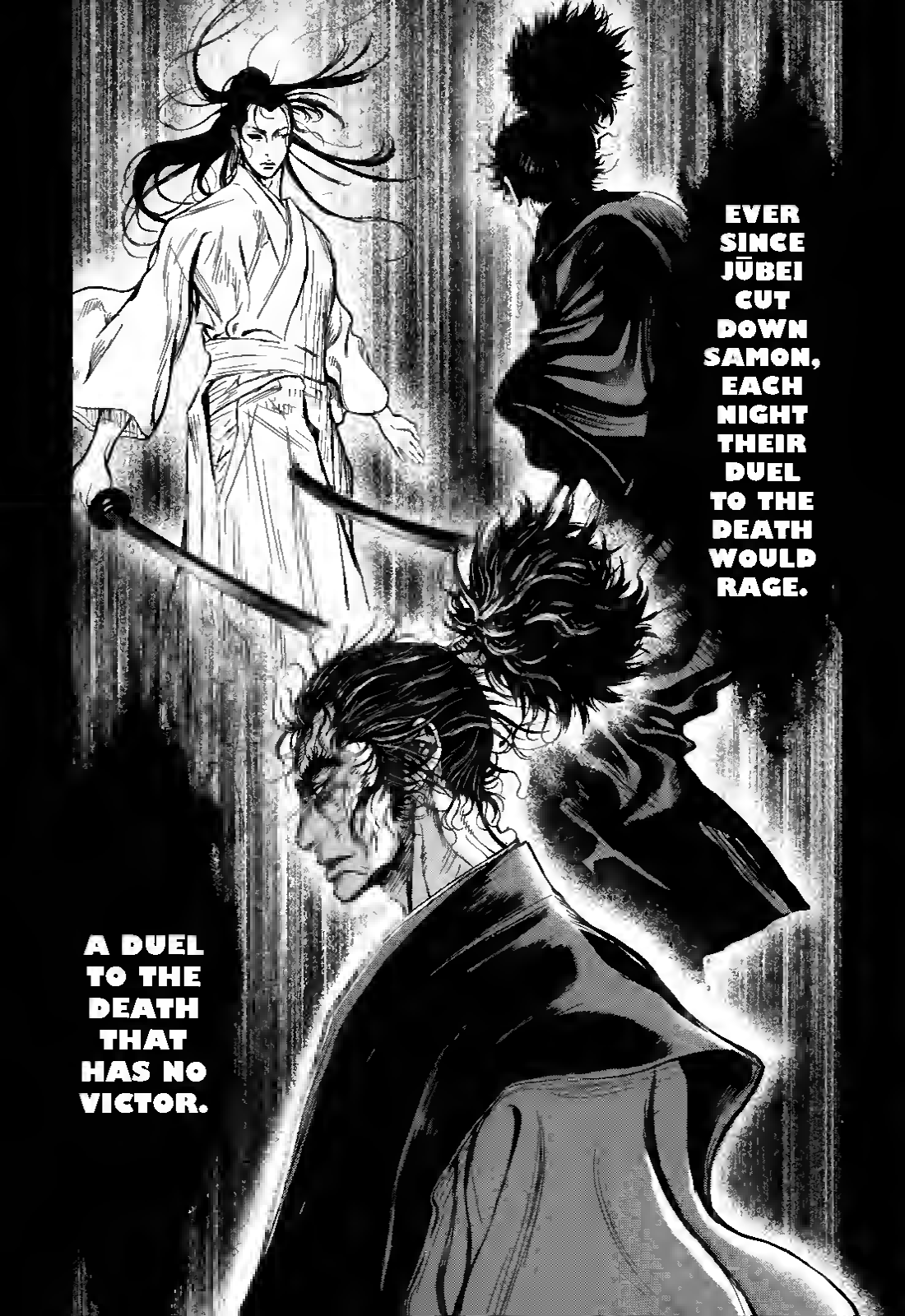


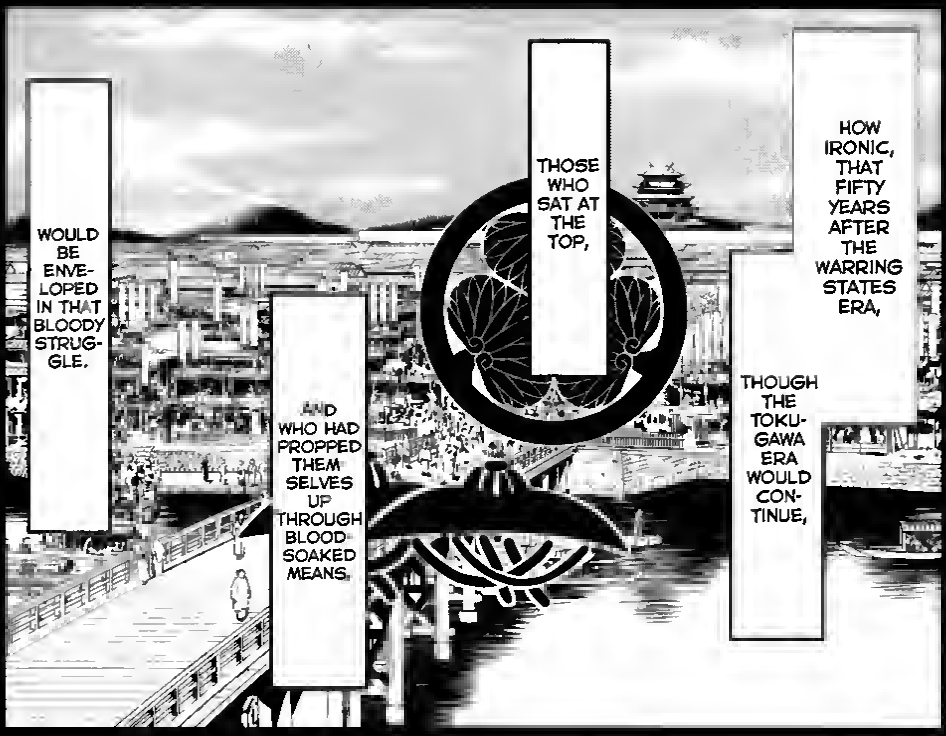
A PITY TO HAVE LOST HIM.
MUNE-NORI "TAJIMA NO KAMI" YAGYŪ—

JŪBEI SHALL HAVE 8,300 KOKU, AND MUNEFUYU 4,000 KOKU. THE REMAINING AMOUNT SHALL BE ADDED TO THE DOMAIN OF SEKISHŪSAI'S HŌTOKU TEMPLE.
AS FOR THE STIPENDS HANDED OUT TO THE YAGYŪ CLAN, I WAS CONSIDERING DIVIDING THEM BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU.
MUNEFUYU YAGYŪ (34)
MITSUYOSHI JŪBEI YAGYŪ (39)

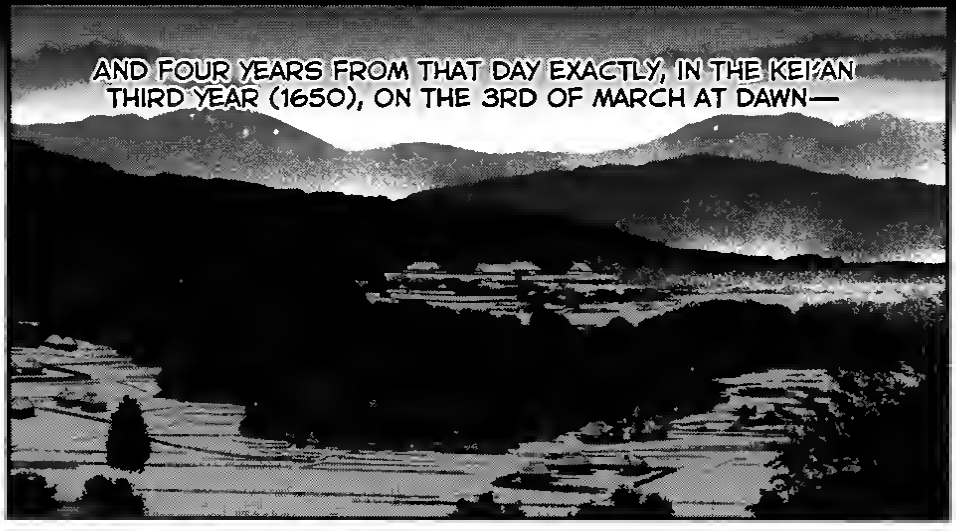

NO OBJEC-TIONS, I ASSUME?
THE THIRD TOKUGAWA SHOGUN, IEMITSU (42)

"Our father's life-long pursuit was the promotion to feudal lord. With one fell swoop, all that is destroyed."
"Then our clan's property is to be divided, lowered below 10,000 koku so that we may no longer hold the title of feudal lord?"
Kukuku, Munenori.
You may leave.
As for you, Jūbei, I need not take any further action with you.
I can see you in the next world, truly regretful now.
What might you see with that right eye of yours?
I can only imagine you see yourself being stabbed by Samon each and every night.
How overly pleased I have been to see you waste away these past seven years.


EVER SINCE JŪBEI CUT DOWN SAMON, EACH NIGHT THEIR DUEL TO THE DEATH WOULD RAGE.
A DUEL TO THE DEATH THAT HAS NO VICTOR.


WOULD BE ENVE-LOPED IN THAT BLOODY STRUG-GLE.
AND WHO HAD PROPPED THEM-SELVES UP THROUGH BLOOD-SOAKED MEANS.
THOSE WHO SAT AT THE TOP,
HOW IRONIC, THAT FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE WARRING STATES ERA,
THOUGH THE TOKU-GAWA ERA WOULD CON-TINUE,

FOR SURELY, THE PEACE OF THE EDO ERA IS ONE BUILT ATOP CORPSES.



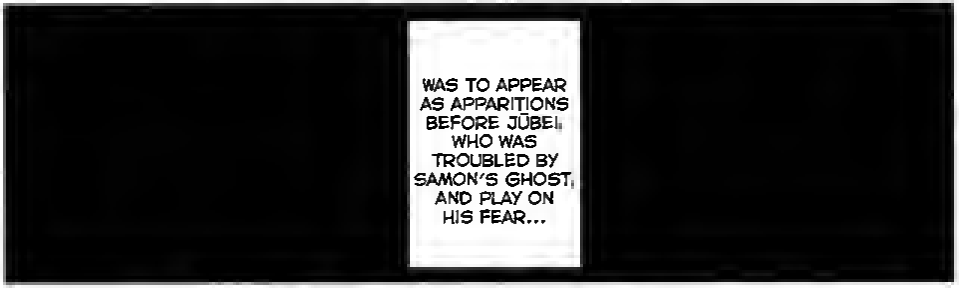
CRUNCH...
CRUNCH...
CRUNCH...
CRUNCH...

Somethins'

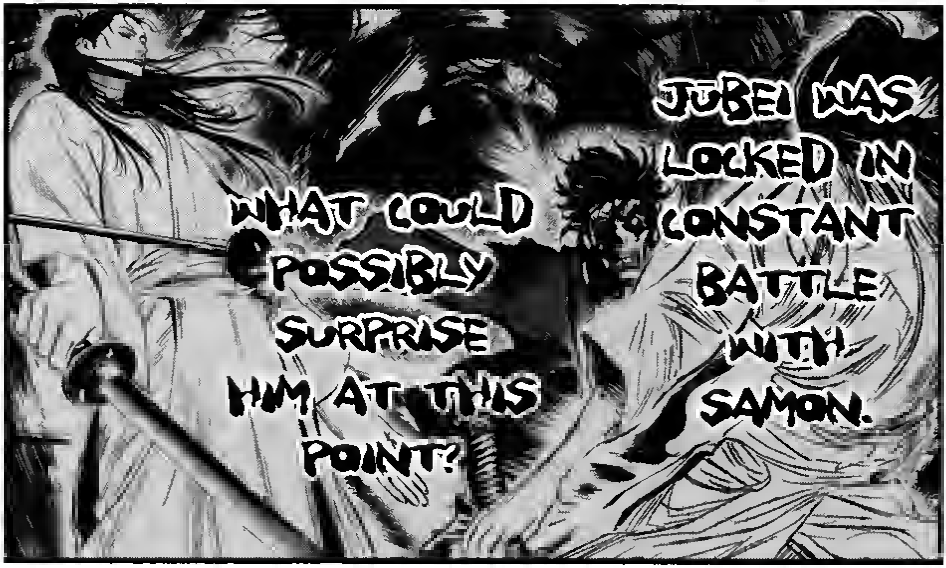
キャハハ
！

THESE ASSAS-SINS
WERE NOT THE VENGE-FUL APPARI-TIONS OF SAMON.

THERE WERE MANY BE-GRUDGED WITH THE YAGYŪ.
OF THOSE MANY, ONE WAS SET ON ASSASSINA-TING JŪBEI.
THEIR SUREFIRE PLAN DEEMED CAPABLE OF ASSAS-SINATING HIM—


WAS TO APPEAR AS APPARITIONS BEFORE JŪBEI, WHO WAS TROUBLED BY SAMON'S GHOST, AND PLAY ON HIS FEAR...

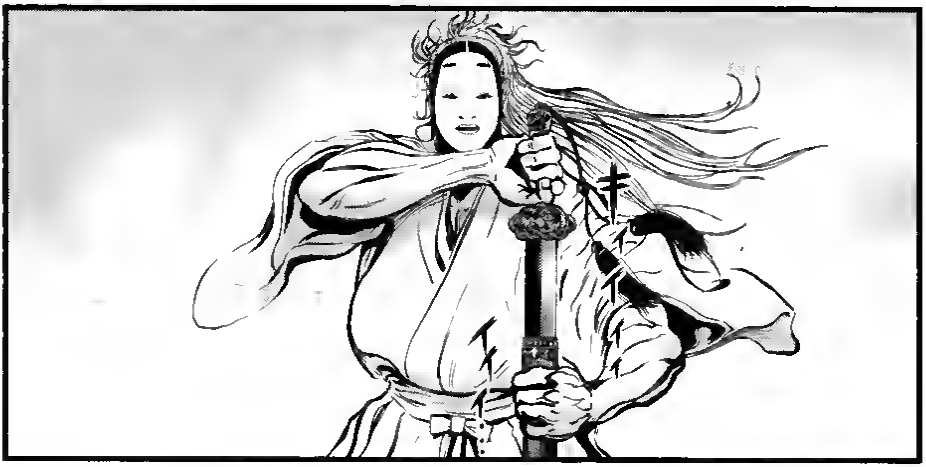
JŪBEI WOULD NOT STIR ONE BIT WHEN FACED WITH THE DEAD!
BUT!

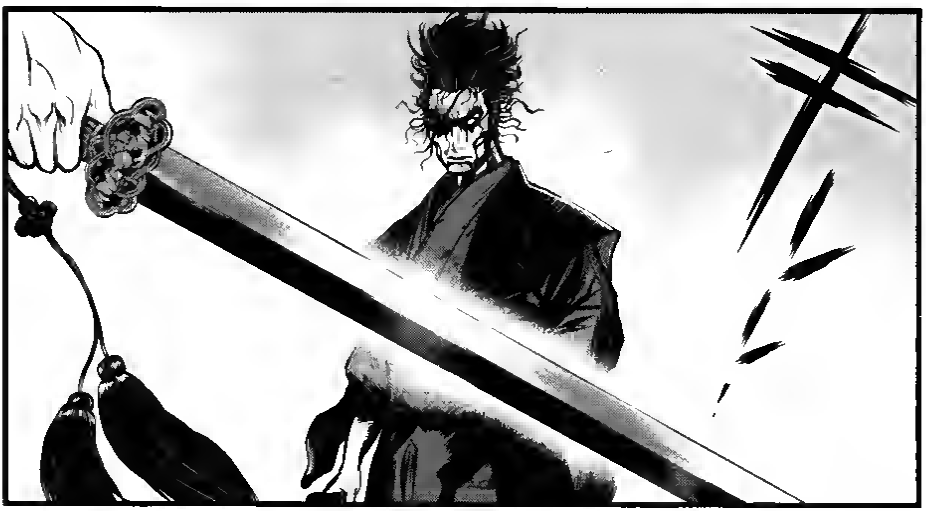

JUBEI WAS LOCKED IN A CONSTANT BATTLE WITH SAMON.
WHAT COULD POSSIBLY SURPRISE HIM AT THIS POINT?

WAS THAT UNLIKE HIS FANTASIES, HE FELT THE FORCE OF THAT SWORD.
THE ONLY THING THAT DID STARTLE HIM

OH JOYOUS OCCUR-RENCE!
HOW HAPPY I AM, SAMON!
THAT I MIGHT ONCE MORE
EXCHANGE BLADES WITH YOU.

Fall back!

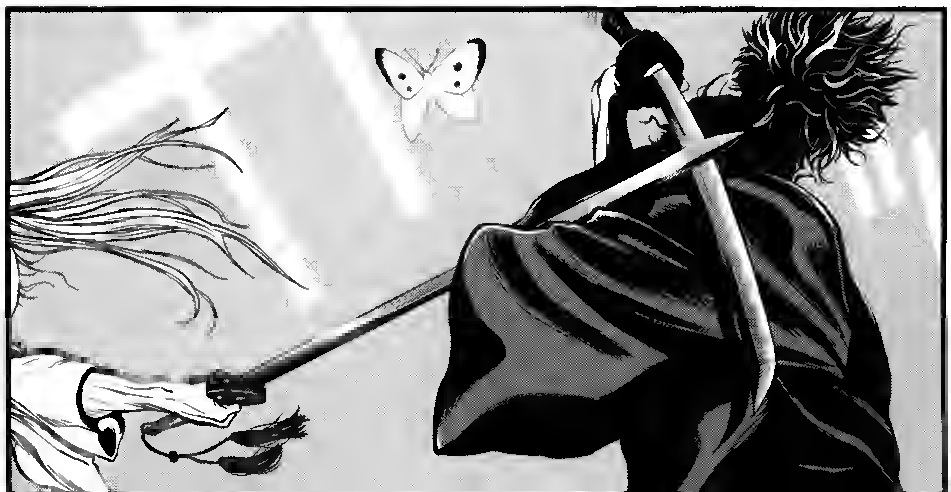


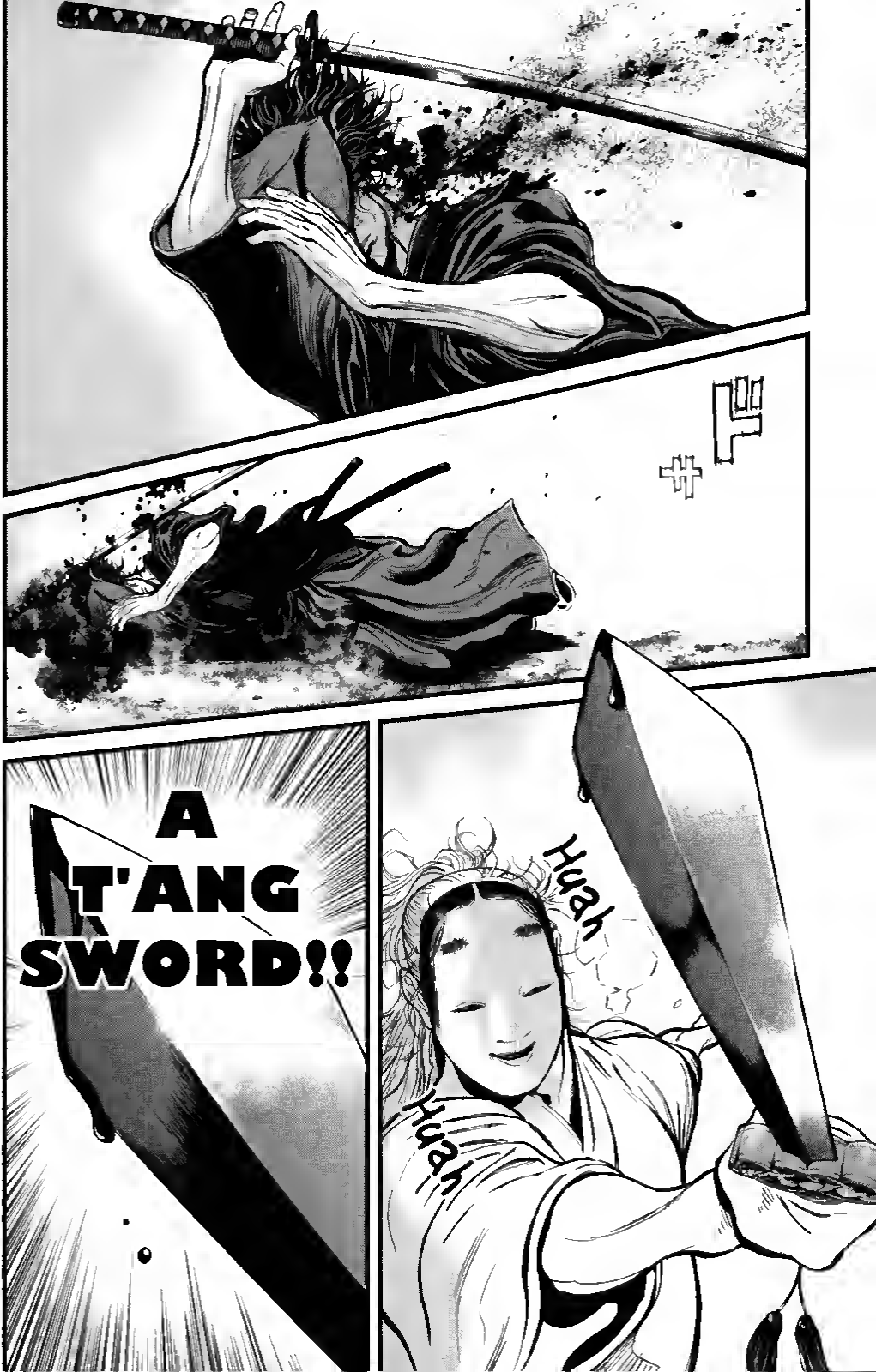


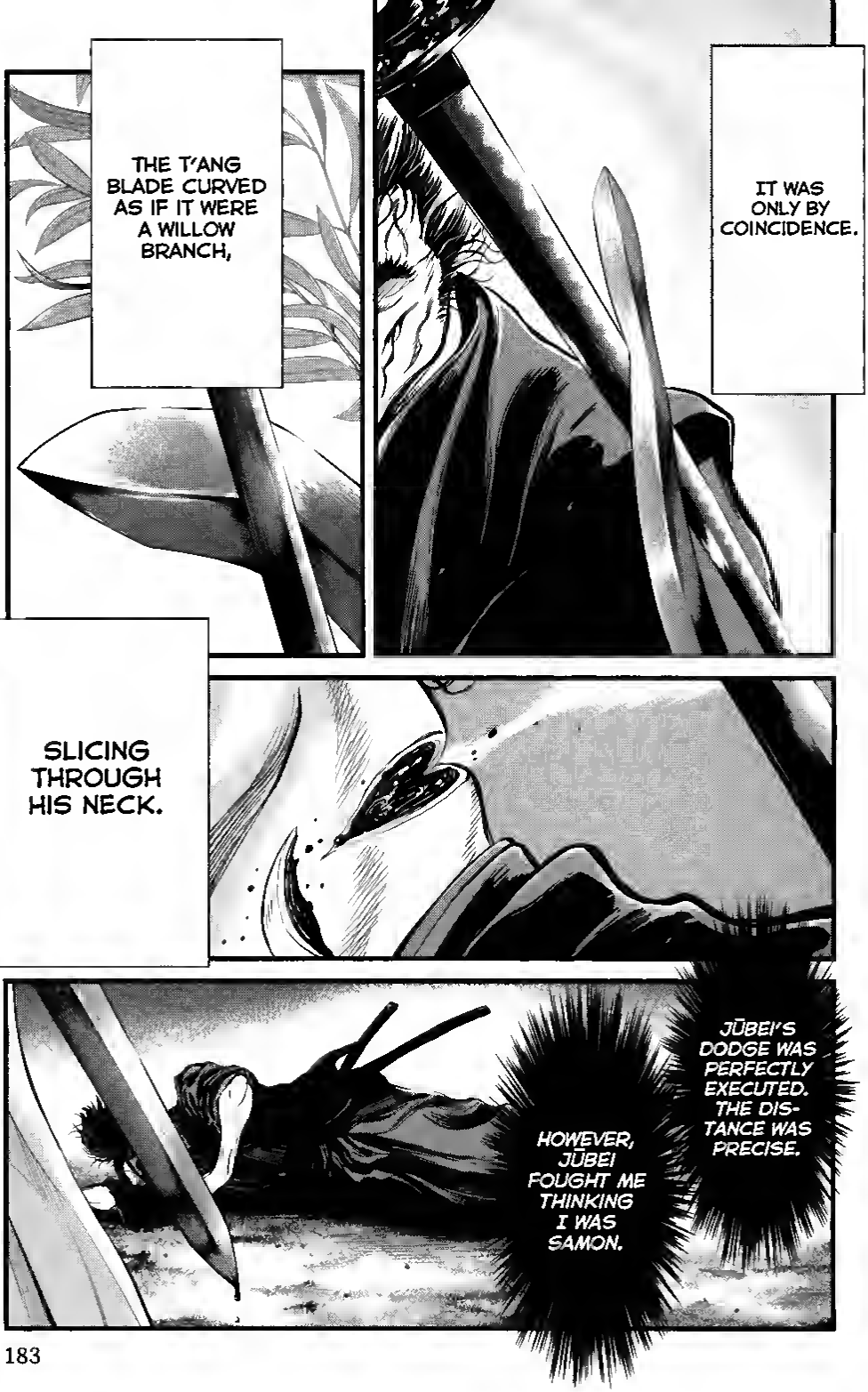
SUCH SPEED!
HOW DIRE! WITH THIS NEXT ATTACK
IT WILL REACH!

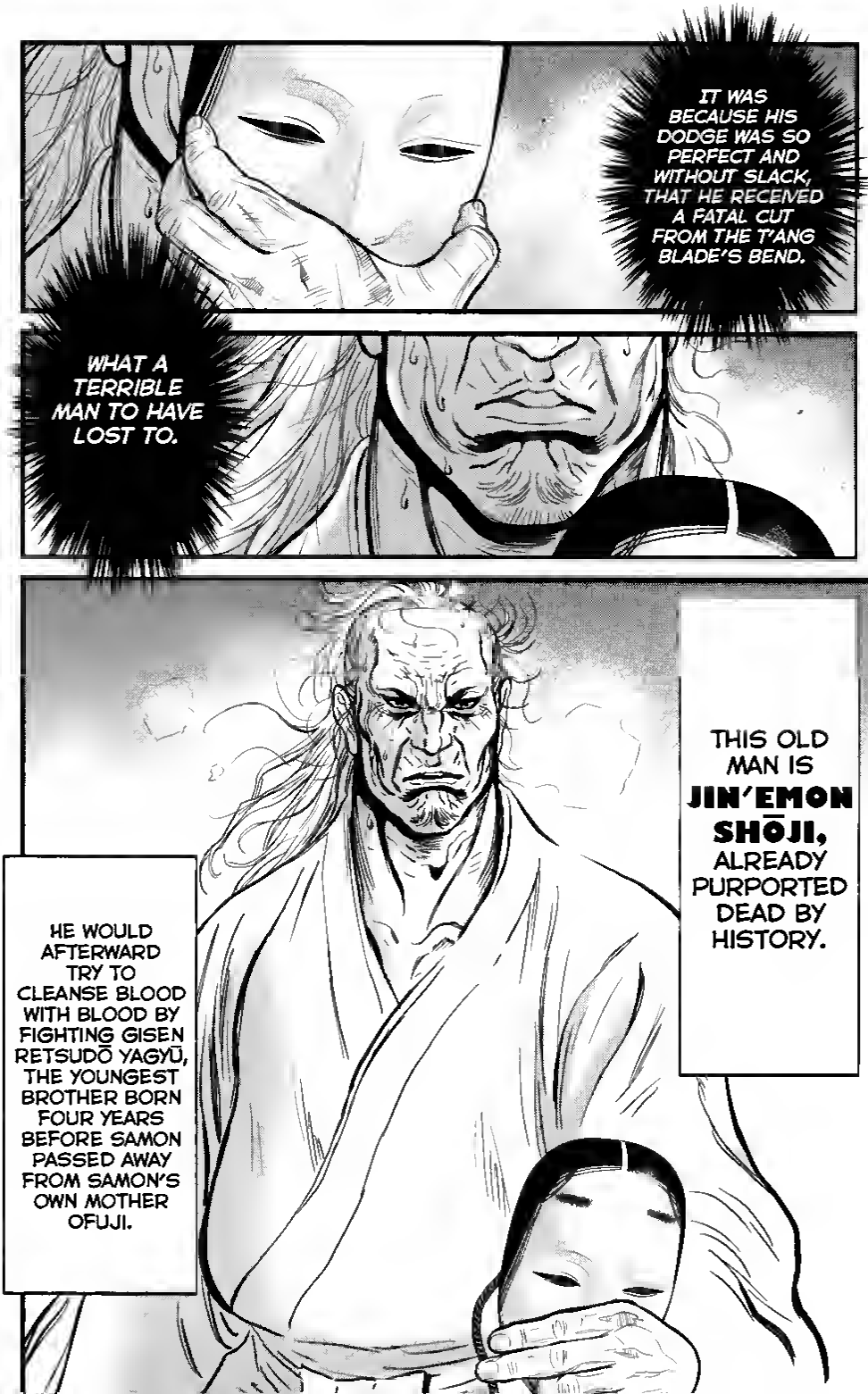
SAMON...

WRONG!
THAT IS...



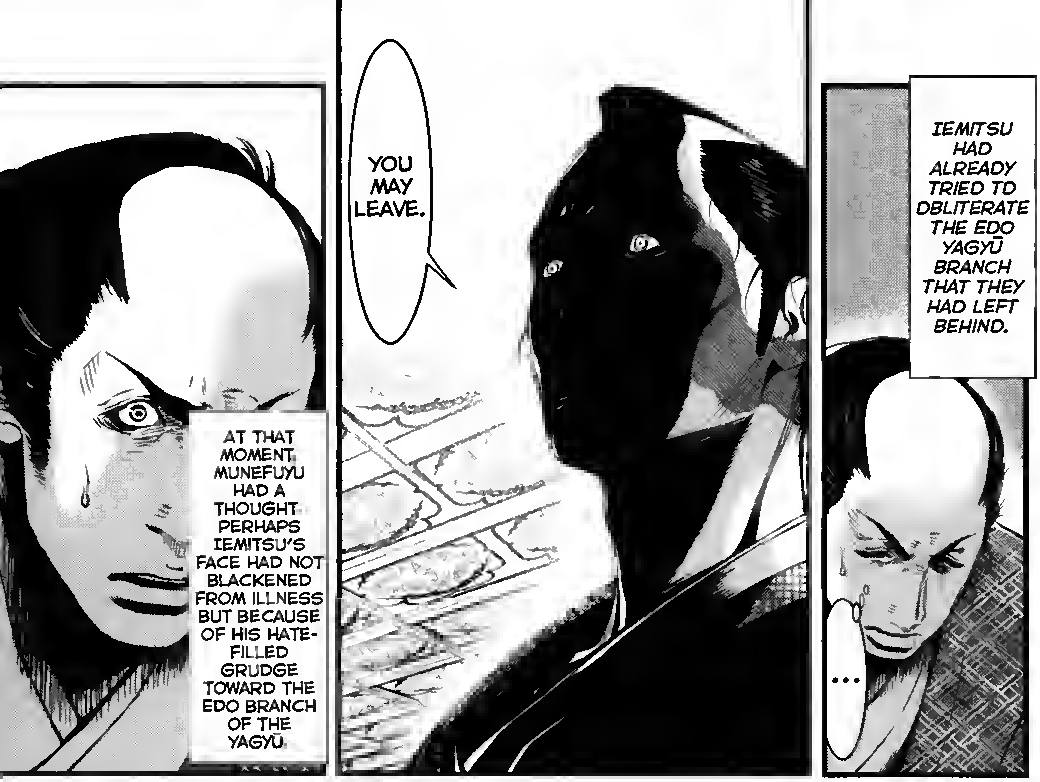

A T'ANG SWORD!!
Huah
Huah


THE T'ANG BLADE CURVED AS IF IT WERE A WILLOW BRANCH,
IT WAS ONLY BY COINCIDENCE.
SLICING THROUGH HIS NECK.
JŪBEI'S DODGE WAS PERFECTLY EXECUTED. THE DISTANCE WAS PRECISE.
HOWEVER, JŪBEI FOUGHT ME THINKING I WAS SAMON.


IT WAS BECAUSE HIS DODGE WAS SO PERFECT AND WITHOUT SLACK, THAT HE RECEIVED A FATAL CUT FROM THE T'ANG BLADE'S BEND.
WHAT A TERRIBLE MAN TO HAVE LOST TO.
THIS OLD MAN IS **JIN'EMON SHŌJI,** ALREADY PURPORTED DEAD BY HISTORY.
HE WOULD AFTERWARD TRY TO CLEANSE BLOOD WITH BLOOD BY FIGHTING GISEN RETSUDŌ YAGYŪ, THE YOUNGEST BROTHER BORN FOUR YEARS BEFORE SAMON PASSED AWAY FROM SAMON'S OWN MOTHER OFUJI.

BUT THAT IS A STORY FOR ANOTHER TIME.
IN THE KEIʼAN THIRD YEAR (1650), ON THE 21ST OF MARCH, JŪBEI, AT THE AGE OF FORTY-THREE, WOULD PASS AWAY WHILE HAWKING.

JŪBEI HAS DIED?...
MUNE-NORI,
THOSE ACCURSED MEN WHO SLAUGH-TERED MY BELOVED SAMON ARE NO LONGER OF THIS WORLD.
AND NOW JŪBEI TOO IS DEAD...
AND YET...


IEMITSU HAD ALREADY TRIED TO OBLITERATE THE EDO YAGYŪ BRANCH THAT THEY HAD LEFT BEHIND.
...
YOU MAY LEAVE.
AT THAT MOMENT, MUNEFUYU HAD A THOUGHT. PERHAPS IEMITSU'S FACE HAD NOT BLACKENED FROM ILLNESS BUT BECAUSE OF HIS HATE-FILLED GRUDGE TOWARD THE EDO BRANCH OF THE YAGYŪ.

PERHAPS THAT GRUDGE ALONE HAD BINDED THE ILL-STRICKEN IEMITSU TO THIS WORLD.

WITHIN THE INTERIOR OF HIS HEART THAT HAD FILLED WITH HATE, IEMITSU WAS ALWAYS THERE "CRYING".

JUST LIKE THE DREAM OF HIM AS A CHILD...

Fin

Samon, The Callous Swordsman, Yagyū

『柳生非情剣―柳枝の剣』を原作に
漫画を描かせていただいた漫画脚本家のつぶやき

田畑由秋

私はファーストガンダムにどっぷりとハマった80年代のオタクなんです。

歴史的知識は〝漫神〟手塚治虫先生の漫画から得るのみで、視聴率を見る限り日本人の大多数が見ている歴史大河ドラマを見ることもなく、時代劇というものにまるで興味がありませんでした。

そんな私がどうやって、隆慶一郎[※1]先生の作品を読むようになったのか？

それは『蒼天の拳』の原哲夫先生が、かつて週刊少年ジャンプで連載されていた『花の慶次―雲のかなたに―[※2]』に出会ったから！　その一言につきます!!

みなさんご存じかもしれませんが、「傾奇者（かぶきもの）」という鮮烈な言葉で始まる、「漢」と書いて「おとこ」と読ませる前田慶次の生きざまを描いたこの作品は、隆慶一郎先生の小説『一夢庵風流記[※3]』を原作にしたスーパー時代劇です。

何がスーパーかというと馬がデカい！　山のようにデカい！　人もデカい、笑っちゃうほどデカい！　まーこの表現は『北斗の拳』の原先生だから誇張しすぎというぐらい

【※1】隆慶一郎
1923年生まれ。編集者・脚本家として活躍したのち、84年『吉原御免状』にて作家デビュー。時代小説において一時代を築くが、わずか5年の作家活動で1989年、急逝。

【※2】『花の慶次―雲のかなたに―』
1990年、集英社刊。「週刊少年ジャンプ」にて1990年から1993年に渡って連載された。現在、小社より新装版全12巻が刊行。

【※3】『一夢庵風流記』
1989年3月、読売新聞社刊。1989年、第2回柴田錬三郎賞受賞。
現在、小社より文庫版が刊行。

誇張しているのだろう……と思いきや、まーたしかに誇張っちゃ誇張なのですが、隆先生の原作を読んで抱く印象というか、そのパワーというのが馬が山ぐらい当たり前のすごさなのですよ！

その隆慶一郎先生、60年代から映画、テレビで脚本家として活躍なされていた方なのだけれど、小説家として『吉原御免状』[※4]を連載したのは84年、なんと60歳の時！

それから66歳で亡くなられるまで、『影武者徳川家康』『鬼麿斬人剣』『かくれさと苦界行』『捨て童子・松平忠輝』『死ぬことと見つけたり』『花と火の帝』『柳生非情剣』[※5]『風の呪殺陣』など、凄まじい数の作品を遺されています。

その作品のほとんどは戦国後期から江戸前期を舞台にしていて、徳川家康、後水尾天皇、柳生を軸に、まるで水島新司先生の『大甲子園』や松本零士先生の作品のように、同じ登場人物が視点を変え描かれたりするところも見どころなのです。

また、「傾奇者」、「傀儡子」[※6]、「公界」[※7]、「道々の輩」[※8]、「死人」など、魅惑的なキーワードを介して描かれる新しい歴史的切り口が面白い。

だが、なんといっても私の心をもっともとらえたのは、人として魅力的であるとはいかなることか、それが一貫して描かれていることでした。

「惚れるに値するキャラクター」この極めてシンプルなテーゼは私の人生にとって一大

【※4】『吉原御免状』
1986年2月、小社刊。第95回直木賞候補作。本作の「第五章 十兵衛」は、この『吉原御免状』の一場面である柳生十兵衛と庄司甚右衛門の死闘を題材にとる。

【※5】『柳生非情剣』
1988年12月、講談社刊。第101回直木賞候補作。本作の原作となった『柳枝の剣』の他、柳生の男達の鮮やかな生き様を描く7編を収録。

【※6】傀儡子
幻術や歌舞を生業に、諸国を自由にさすらう芸能集団。女性は遊女、巫女でもあった。

【※7】公界
日本の中世において見られた、世俗から遮断された不可侵の聖なる場所や、奴隷・犯罪者などが庇護される自治組織・駆込寺などを指す。

【※8】道々の輩
傀儡子、山伏、猿楽師、遊女など、特殊な職能をもち、全国を自由に行き来することができた人々の総称。流れ者。

転機となったのです。

なぜ人は生きるのか？　導きだそうとしている真理とは、記憶という不確かなものに操られたまやかしにすぎないのではないか？

あらゆるものを懐疑し、理屈をこね回して、しかも現実ではみっともないマネを晒して生きてきた果てに何の漫画も描けなかった20代前半の自分にとって、魅力的な生き様を描く、漢惚れする人物を描く、ということを貫く作品スタイルは私にとって正に「うおっ、まぶしっ!!」でありました。

ただし今回短編として取り上げた『柳生非情剣』は隆先生の作品の中でも主流とはズレた話で、敵側として扱われる柳生家を主役にした話なのです。

ガンダムでたとえるならザビ家列伝のような話に当たるような話。

読んでいた時はそんなに暗い印象を受けなかったのだけれど、改めてビジュアル化してみると、隆慶一郎先生作品には珍しく陰な話であることに気づかされました。

そんな今回の漫画化を読者の皆様にどう受け入れていただけるのか、チョー不安な日々を過ごしております。

【ザビ家】TVアニメ『機動戦士ガンダム』において、主人公アムロ・レイらが属する地球連邦と対立する国家「ジオン公国」の頂点に君臨する一族。

この物語はフィクションです。実在の人物・団体・事件等には、いっさい関係ありません。

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柳生非情剣 SAMON

初出：週刊コミックバンチ第276号（2007年３月２日号）
週刊コミックバンチ第307号（2007年10月19日号）
週刊コミックバンチ第327号（2008年３月21日号）
週刊コミックバンチ第326号（2008年３月28日号）
週刊コミックバンチ第387号（2009年６月19日号）

発行 ―― 2009年6月15日　初版

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KBビル9F
TEL.0422-23-1585
http://www.shinchosha.co.jp

印刷・製本 ―― 図書印刷株式会社

カバーデザイン ―― 竹内亮輔

カバー背景イラスト ―― 池田政子

題字 ―― 田中祥月

コンテンツ配給 ―― 株式会社 コアミックス
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メディ・コーブビル8　3F
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ISBN978-4-10-771487-9 C9979
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